

Authenticating the Johannine *Injil*: Sunnite “*Polemirenic*” Interpretive Methodological Approaches to the Gospel of John

A dissertation by

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presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate Theological Union

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Berkeley, California

August 2016

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By Ali J. Ataie

Abstract

The primary method of this dissertation is a faith-based hermeneutic of the Gospel of John in which the entire text is authenticated as being the true Gospel of Jesus Christ mentioned in the Qur'an. The text of John is interpreted through the “theo-mystical” lens of Sunnite Muslim scholars such as al-Junayd, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Arabi. The Gospel is also analyzed through secular scholarship, that is, non-confessionally/theologically, although there will be minor or major theological implications resulting from such engagement. This is a pre-canonical/exegetical analysis of the Gospel in which its themes and contents will be viewed as a product of its historical, that is to say, its theological, social, and cultural milieu. In other words, the Gospel will be situated within its historical context and examined as to how it is in dialogue with its initial audience. The impetus for such analysis will be the popular Muslim belief in the “*Injil* Archetype,” the now lost actual Revelation of God to Jesus, which is reflected at times in the New Testament canonical gospels, or “pseudo-*injils*.”

In conclusion, due to its more honorable treatment of the Bible, as well as its “explanatory power,” given the fact that the Qur'an accepts the New Testament gospels as the very *Injil*, the textually-affirming approach in which the entire text of the Gospel of John's Prologue and Book of Signs is authenticated and understood as the highly mystical aspect of a rigidly monotheistic teaching whose trajectory intersects Sunnite Islam's normative theo-mystical teachings, is more compelling than the historical critical

approach for Muslim academics, both Eastern and Western. When the Qur'an speaks of the *Injil*, it is speaking of the Gospel of John and reading the Gospel of John through a “*polemirenic*” Sunni confessional lens will reveal that the Johannine Jesus (*'Isa*) was a beloved and sanctified agent of God, annihilated in God's very character, who taught the world profound spiritual verities. Thus the teachings of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Fourth Gospel, are in agreement with the teachings of the Qur'an and Muhammad, as espoused by the great spiritual masters of Sunnite Islam.

Munir Jiwa, PhD (Dissertation coordinator)

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God the Almighty for everything, especially for sending His Messenger Muhammad, the one who said, “He who does not thank people, does not thank God” (من لم يشكر الناس لم يشكر الله). Thus I would like to thank my parents, Hajj Golamreza and Mahmonir Ataie as well as my loving wife, Roya Naisan Ataie, and my lovely girls Maryam, Ayesha, and baby Zaynab for their unconditional and invaluable support for me and my educational goals. May God bless you all and elevate your ranks with Him.

Thank you Dr. Munir Jiwa (my academic advisor and MA thesis/PhD dissertation committee coordinator). You are a true gift from God whose exemplary character, vast knowledge, and prophetic concern for your students will never be forgotten by me. As my friend and mentor, you took me under your wing seven years ago and have guided me every step of the way. *Jazak Allah khayr* my dear brother! Thank you Sr. Dr. Marianne Farina for your excellent emulation of Jesus Christ and for motivating me to seek out the beauty of the Gospel of John. Thank you Dr. Hatem Bazian for your constant service to God’s religion and people, your unequalled brilliance, and penetrating theological insights. It will be my honor to tell my grandchildren one day (God willing) that you served on my committee.

Also, thank you Dr. David Balch for your valuable critical engagement, your incredible acumen, and your compassionate and caring disposition. Thank you for introducing me to New Testament textual criticism, Philo, and the Qumran texts. Thank you Dr. Gary Pence for your amazing erudition and guidance as well as for your selflessness by putting in many hours of your time to proof-read my dissertation and

review my Greek to English translations. Your love of the Greek language is truly inspiring. Thank you Dr. Judith Berling for being a truly great professor. Thank you for pushing me to think deeply about the methodological directions of my dissertation and providing me opportunities to present my research.

Thank you Shaykh Hamza Yusuf for being my spiritual mentor. Thank you for teaching me how to love God and His Messenger.

Lastly, thank you Omar Naisan, my brother-in-law and mentee, for not only your technical expertise but also for your friendship.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה רְאֵה נִתְתִּיךָ אֱלֹהִים לְפָרְעֹה
(שמות VII.I)

ΕΓΩΚΑΙΟΠΑΤΗΡ
ΕΝΕCΜΕΝ¹
(KATA ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ Χ.ΧΧΧ)

مَنْ يُطِيعَ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ
(سورة النساء IV.LXXX)

*One should be as Jesus, son of Mary,
On the way of sincerity,
To grasp the value and verity of the chapter
And verse of the Gospel.
- Sana'i, Diwan²*

¹ The text as it appears in the Codex Sinaiticus (א), folio 253b, scribe A.

² Quoted from: Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis* (London: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi, 1983), 53.

Chapter One: Sunnite “*Polemirenic*” Interpretive Methodological Approaches to the Gospel of John

Introduction

What exactly does a Muslim do with the New Testament, specifically the Gospel of John, the most Islamically “problematic” of the canonical gospels and simultaneously, the *ancora theologiae* of orthodox, that is to say Trinitarian Christianity? The Qur’an claims to be a revelatory extension of the prophetic legacies of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus; a confirmation of what was revealed to the prophets and patriarchs of ancient Israel (بني اسرائيل) as well as a vindication of the Christological *kerygma* of the apostles (الحواريون) of Jesus Christ (عيسى المسيح). Yet the Qur’an categorically rejects the dogma of the Trinity (Q 4:171), the pre-eternality (begotten sonship)³ of Christ (Q 19:88-92), vicarious atonement (2:286.1), and even the Crucifixion itself, so it seems (Q 4:157).⁴ How do these repudiations square with the iconic John 3:16?⁵ To account for the theological

³ For Athanasius, the “only-begottenness” of Christ (the Logos) meant that he was “from the essence of the Father” (*ek tes ousias tou patros*; *Decr.* 19; *Syn.* 51), thus pre-eternal. Gregory of Nyssa said about the Son, “he never begins to exist” (*C. Eun.* 1.39). Also Origen: “There was never a time when the Logos was not” (*Princ.* 1.2.9).

⁴ See: Gabriel Said Reynolds, The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 72, 2009, pp 237-258. doi:10.1017/S0041977X09000500. By analyzing the Arabic text of Q 3:55 and 4:157, and citing several Qur’anic exegetes, Reynolds argues that the death of Jesus is actually confirmed by the Qur’an. See also: M. Ayoub, “Towards an Islamic Christology II: the death of Jesus, reality or delusion?”, *The Muslim World* 70, 1980, pp 91-121; B.T. Lawson, “The Crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur’an and qur’anic commentary: a historical survey.” *The Bulletin of the Henry Martin Institute of Islamic Studies* 10, 1991, pp 34-62.

⁵ “For God loved the world in such a way that he gave His unique Son (The Messiah), so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.” (Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ’ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον).

dissonance between the Qur'an and the positions of orthodox Christian Trinitarianism, traditional Islamic scholarship, based on several Qur'anic passages (Q 2:79; 3:78; 4:46), crystallized the doctrine of *tahrif* (تحريف), or "corruption," which Muslim scholars define more specifically as either textual *fabrication* and/or textual *misinterpretation* perpetrated by post-apostolic Christian scholastic authorities. Thus with respect to the Bible, or New Testament in this case, Muslim intellectuals and academics have advocated three distinct judgements/approaches: 1) Non-engagement: *a priori* total rejection; 2) Partial textual authentication in some respect prompted by belief in either the "*Injil* Archetype," which will be discussed later, or the canonical gospels as the corrupted *Injil*; the former assumes that the four gospels "reflect" genuine aspects of Christ's original message which is not (or no longer) extant in writing, while the latter assumes that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John *is* the very *Injil*, but have been adulterated by scribes for either pietistic and/or deceptive reasons. This approach establishes *tahrif immediately* on the level of the text and tends to combine theological hermeneutics with some aspect(s) of biblical criticism and/or modern historiography. Thus passages that seem to predict Muhammad (the Matthean *Barenash*⁶ and Johannine Paraclete [Gr. παράκλητος; possibly Heb. מְנַחֵם] prophecies) as well as those that indicate the non-deity of Jesus (Mark 10:18 for example)⁷ are either affirmed as refractions of the true *Injil* or authenticated as elements of the actual *Injil*. 3) Full textual authentication of the canonical gospels as the true *Injil* where *tahrif* is established *only* on the level of post-biblical and patristic exegetical

⁶ "The Son of Man." Compare the Qur'an's statement that "the similitude of Muhammad and his Companions in the *Injil*" is "like a seed which sent forth its blade and became strong" (Q 48:29.5) with Matthew's parable of the mustard seed and weeds (Matthew 12 & 13) in which the mustard seed, when it is grown, is the "greatest among herbs" (μεῖζον τῶν λαχάνων ἐστίν), the sower is "the Son of Man" (υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), and the good seed are "the children of the kingdom" (υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας).

⁷ "And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good, but one - God. (ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ Τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός).

Christian tradition. In other words, the evangelists got it right, it was Justin (d. 165 CE), Irenaeus (d. 202 CE), Tertullian (d. 225 CE), Origen (d. 253), Athanasius (d. 373 CE), Augustine (d. 430 CE), the Cappadocians,⁸ and others who were guilty of misapprehension. According to this view, the Qur'an problematizes *Christianity*, not Christian Scriptures, and even here a level of historical interpretation will be necessary, because "theological readings of Scripture depend and draw on other approaches, and will make use of their insights."⁹ Interestingly, Al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505) in his *Jalalayn*¹⁰ mentions that all three of the above cited verses indicating *textual* corruption, Q 2:79, 3:78, & 4:43, applies to "the Jews" (*al-Yahud*) like Ka'b b. al-Ashraf and "the Torah," and not the Christians and the *Injil*. Contemporary scholar, Muhammad 'Ali al-Sabuni, says: "As is stated in the Qur'an, their *Injil* has been changed and altered," yet references no *ayah*.¹¹ Thus the apparent lack of the *Torah's* references to Muhammad are because these passages were removed by Jewish scribal elements. Al-Razi, however, finds this highly unlikely, and wonders if it was even possible for such a campaign to have been carried out successfully given the Torah's status as a multiply-attested and agreed upon text. Thus for al-Razi, distortion appears to be in the interpretations.¹² The third approach is that of Ghazali is his *Radd al-Jamil* as well as that of late Mamluk exegete Ibrahim b.

'Umar al-Biq'a'i (d. 885/1480) in his remarkable Evangel Diatessaron or Gospel

⁸ Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. The Council of Constantinople (381 CE), presided over by Theodosius I, affirmed the positions of the Cappadocians as constituting "imperial orthodoxy." Dynamic Monarchists, Arians, and those who maintained *heteroousian* positions were officially declared as heretics.

⁹ Marianne Mey Thompson, "The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading" in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser, (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2008), 234.

¹⁰ *al-Jalalayn*, Q 2:79, 3:78, & 4:43. Also see: Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, trans. by Feras Hamza, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2008).

¹¹ Muhammad 'Ali al-Sabuni, *Al-Nabuwwa wa'l Anbiya*, trans. by Muhammad Idris Esau under the title *Prophethood and the Prophets* (Saida: Al-Maktaba al-Assriyah, 2004), 212.

¹² *Mafatih*, Q 2:75.

Harmony, *Al-Aqwal al-Qawimah fi Hukm al-Naql min al-Kutub al-Qadimah*. Al-Biqā'i believes that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is the *Injil* yet they (the Gospels or what Watson calls "the fourfold canonical Gospel"¹³) do not support the deity of Christ, nor are they unequivocal even about the Crucifixion, and al-Biqā'i interprets the language of "sonship" and "fatherhood" as metaphorical and demonstrative of Christ's loving relationship with his "Father."¹⁴ Saleh says: "The Qur'an, in light of al-Biqā'i's usage of the Gospels, is speaking of *the Jesus of the Gospels*" (emphasis mine).¹⁵

The fact that most contemporary Muslim scholars don't take the New Testament very seriously is disconcerting and disserving. I propose that the study of the New Testament is *essentially* Islamic, as Muslims must attempt to understand the *umam* (faith communities) of the past that set the stage, as it were, for the Revelation of Muhammad. Engaging in biblical studies/hermeneutics would substantially enhance Muslim understanding of the Qur'an itself when the latter engages intertextually with the biblical text, which happens quite often. At times, the Qur'an seems to advocate finding confirmation for its contents by "asking those who recite the Book (Ar. الكتاب; Gr. βιβλιον; Eng. Bible) from before you" (Q 10:94). The reference is obviously to Jews and Christians. According to the *Sirah* of prophetic historiographer Ibn Hisham (d. 218/833), the Prophet himself sought the counsel of his wife's cousin Waraqah b. Nawfal, a

¹³ Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 8.

¹⁴ Walid A. Saleh and Kevin Casey, "An Islamic Diatessaron: Al-Biqā'i's Harmony of the Four Gospels," in *Translating the Bible into Arabic: Historical, Text-Critical, and Literary Aspects*, Sara Binay and Stefan Leder, eds. (Beirut: DGIA, 2012), 87. See especially Appendix (Table 1) for a complete breakdown of the Diatessaron by Gospel (pp. 89-115). For the critical edition of al-Biqā'i's text, see: Walid A. Saleh, ed., *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and Introduction to al-Biqā'i's Bible Treatise* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). For al-Biqā'i's Qur'an exegesis in which he utilizes the Bible over the *Isra'illiyat*, see: Ibrahim b. Umar al-Biqā'i, *Nazm al-durar fi tanasub al-ayat wa'l suwar* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995).

¹⁵ *ibid.*

Christian learned man, when he experienced his apocalypse and received his commission in the cave of Hira' in Ramadan 610 CE. According to Imam al-Baghawi (d. 516/1122), the great Companion and cousin of the Prophet 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas (d. 68/687), in fact the founder of Qur'anic exegesis (تفسير) and authority in mystical interpretation (تأويل), sought the opinion of the Yemenite Rabbi Ka'b al-Ahbar (d. 32/653) about the meaning of the famous "Verse of Light" (*Ayah al-Nur*), Q 24:35, to which the latter replied, "it's a reference to the heart of Muhammad."¹⁶ And the celebrated theologian and historian Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 311/923), whose seminal exegesis of the Qur'an, *Jam'i ul-Bayan* is considered an indispensable text in traditional curricula, also quoted extensively from the Bible (*al-Isra' illiyat*) to elaborate upon the Qur'an. Finally, Imam al-Ghazali says in his *Bidayah al-Hidayah*, "Our conception of useful knowledge (العلم النافع) is what we have already expounded in *The Revival of the Sacred Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din)*.¹⁷ If you accept this conception, study it and practice it, then teach it and preach it. When a man knows these things and practices them, that man *shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*, according to the witness of Jesus, peace be upon him" (emphasis mine).¹⁸ Ghazali is not quoting the Qur'an nor a *hadith* of Muhammad, he is paraphrasing Matthew 5:17.

However, as Ernst says, the relationship between the Bible and Qur'an can be

¹⁶ Maulana Muhammad Shafi, *Ma'arif al-Qur'an*, vol. 6, translated by Muhammad Ishrat Husain (Karachi: Maktaba-e-Darul 'Uloom, 2008), 434. Muhammad Taqi Usmani mentions, however, that Ka'b al-Ahbar is considered unreliable by many Muslim scholars primarily due to his perpetuation of *Isra' illiyat*. See: Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *An Approach to the Sciences of the Qur'an* (Karachi: Darul-Ishaat, 2007), 364-365. According to Ghazali, Ubayy b. Ka'b's reading was, "The similitude of His light in the heart of the believer is like a niche" (مثل نوره في قلب المؤمن كمشكاة), *Miskat al-Anwar*, 2.15.

¹⁷ This is a reference to the *Ihya's* Book I: The Book of Knowledge (*Kitab al-'Ilm*).

¹⁸ Al-Ghazali, *The Beginning of Guidance*, translated by Mashhad Al-Allaf (IIC - Classic Series, 1426/2005), 29.

“complicated and contentious”¹⁹ especially in light of frequent attempts by many modern Muslim intellectuals, in their ardent desire to demonstrate the supremacy of the Qur’an, to distance the Qur’an from what they consider to be a superseded and corrupted text, replete with contradictions, absurdities, narrative inaccuracies, as well as theological obfuscations. We have seen this all before. There was a concerted Christian effort in the past to distance Christianity from its Jewish roots.²⁰ However, it can be argued, as Ernst does,²¹ that the earliest of Muslim exegetes, those who were explicating upon the Qur’an before various “sciences” (*‘ulum*) such as *hadith*, *asbab al-nuzul*, *naskh*, *sirah*, etc., were canonized, were primarily concerned with Arabic, structure, and the *Bible* and other Near-East sources in their various commentaries of their holy text. With respect specifically to the highly esoteric Gospel of John, it is my contention that rigorous academic Muslim engagement with the Johannine text would yield amazing faith-confirming results that demonstrate the Christological/theological claims of the Qur’an and Islam’s, what I call, “theo-mystical” (Sufi) tradition as articulated by great Muslim mystics and metaphysicians such as *Shaykh al-Ta’ifah* Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 297/910), *Hujjah al-Islam* Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* Muhyidin Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 638/1240), and the Moroccan Master Ahmad b. ‘Ajibah (d. 1224/1809).

This theo-mystical Muslim hermeneutic can be accomplished non-polemically by applying two distinct “*polemirenic*” methodologies, that is to say, rigorously academic

¹⁹ Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 150.

²⁰ Buzzard writes: “I propose that the Church, driven in some curious way by a distaste for things Jewish, has jettisoned the very Jewish creed of its Jewish founder and Savior, Jesus.” Anthony Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian: A Call to Return to the Creed of Jesus* (Morrow: Restoration Fellowship, 2007), 20. Gregory of Nyssa pejoratively referred to Arian Christology as “Jewish” because the Arians did not accept the full divinity of the Son (*C. Eun.* 1.15, 21).

²¹ Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an*, 63.

and “normative”²² in the sense of operating within what Schneiders calls, “ideal” parameters;²³ both assuming that Jesus Christ received a Revelation from God, and both mediating between unacademic vitriol (polemic) and unscriptural innovation, concession-making, and non-traditionalism (irenic), thus “*polemirenic*:” one methodology that is *fully* text-affirming and explicitly theological while utilizing historical perspectives for support: the Gospel of John as the true *Injil*; and the other, interdisciplinary, textually-critical and historical with significant theological implications: the Gospel of John as a reflection of the *Injil* Archetype. Secular historians may find these approaches a bit strange, even the latter, which is neither Troeltschian²⁴ nor even Duhemian.²⁵ In other words, the second approach assumes that miracles *are* possible, in fact they were performed by Jesus, and that books *can* be inspired by God; the real question is: Is the

²² By “normative” Islam I mean adherence to one of four schools of jurisprudence (Hanafite, Shaf’ite, Malikite, or Hanbalite) as well as acceptance of either Ash’arite or Maturidite theology. I understand the potential problematic use of the term “normative” and how it may carry some negative connotations in Western academic circles, but there is no reason to import these negativities upon Sunni Muslim understanding of the term. In fact, to be normative for most Sunnis simply means to be a good practicing Muslim who believes in the Qur’an as a divine Revelation. This Western colonization of Eastern religious terminology is also apparent with the term “gnostic,” which was used pejoratively by early proto-orthodox Christians to refer to heretics. Amongst early Muslims, however, to be a gnostic (‘*arif bi Allah*) meant to be a possessor of *ma’rifah*, sacred episteme of the Divine; a knowledge that was possessed more fully by the prophets and saints of God. Furthermore, to call a Muslim a “fundamentalist” (*usuli*) means to call him/her a Muslim who specializes in the foundational principles of orthodoxy/orthopraxis. Muslims are quite often surprised to learn that the terms “Father” (*Abb*), “Son” (*Ben*), and “Holy Spirit” (*Ruach Qadosh*) are Hebraic/Jewish in their origins and predate the Christian era. However these terms were significantly redefined and theologized through the lens of the patristic authorities and subsequent orthodox Christian creeds.

²³ Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999) xxx.

²⁴ Following the school of Van Harvey which claims that “historical scholars must reject any claims of divine action in history, and take a suspicious attitude toward claims of divine revelation.” Quoted from: C. Stephen Evans, “The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: From What Perspective Should It Be Assessed?” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 115.

²⁵ Following Plantinga which claims that “the historical biblical scholar must not assume that miracles are possible, or that particular books are inspired by God, but the scholar must also not assume that miracles are impossible or that a book cannot be inspired.” Quoted from: C. Stephen Evans, “The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: From What Perspective Should It Be Assessed?” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 115. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, “Two (or More) Types of Biblical Scholarship,” in *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Gospel of John inspired by God? These approaches will place the Qur'an in the very center of the revelatory tradition of Abraham and allow Muslims to join and complement the wider dialogue of religion in the West as well as remedy their often impoverished understandings of the Bible and its people (اهل الكتاب). In this way, the Muslim reader of the New Testament will acquire a new appreciation for the biblical text and will have the ability to rise out of the often toxic polemical discourse that only seems to reinforce the fears of many non-Muslim Westerners that Islam is an anti-Christian virus, the “formidable antagonist of Christianity” to quote Muir,²⁶ and the Qur'an a biblical travesty. I agree with the famous Catholic Islamicist Hans Kung who used to always say that global peace would not be possible until there is harmony between Islam and Christianity. Beautiful steps have been taken recently with the “Common Word” and “Covenants” Initiatives, encouraging Muslim and Christians to live up to their ethical ideals,²⁷ but initiatives encouraging believers from both sides to appreciate one another's Scriptures remain elusive.

I hope that Muslims will come to appreciate the Gospel of John as a text anchored in God's oneness (وحدانية [John 17:3]) and reflective of the loving relationship that Christ has with God. I hope that they will encounter the Johannine Jesus ('Isa) as one who exegetes (ἐξηγήσατο, John 1:18) “the Father,” making “Him known” (يعرفه) by making himself known - “Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father” (ὁ ὥρακός ἐμὲ ὥρακεν τὸν πατέρα [John 14:9]), since he (Jesus) is the sanctified and perfected agent of

²⁶ Quoted from: Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Boston: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 7.

²⁷ See: John Andrew Morrow, *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the World* (Angelico Press/Sophia Perennis, 2013), xviii-xx.

God's activity in the world. Thus *Christi actio fuit nostra instructio*²⁸ and through the *imitatio Christi* we also may draw near unto God and actualize mystical union with Him at the levels of nearness (قرب), absorption (استغراق), and the annihilation of the ego-self (فناء). In this sense, the Johannine Jesus parallels the Qur'anic Muhammad who reflects God's character and attributes on earth, is "one" with Allah in his obedience and pleasure (Q 4:80; 9:62), and whose Precedent provides a spiritual path (طريقة) by which others may achieve mystical union (جمع). In other words, the theo-mystical locus of the Christic and Muhammadan teaching involves divinization (*theosis*) through imitation (*mimesis*). To put it in Johannine terms, "he gave them authority to be children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ)."

The Masters of Religion

Perhaps the study of comparative world religions has its origins in the writings of the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (d. 425 BCE), "the father of Western history," who wrote quite extensively about the religious aspects of the Greco-Persian Wars. However many Western scholars, due to the strictly polemical contributions of medieval Christian scholarship, maintain that the most academically sophisticated and thorough treatment of the subject matter arrived with Islam and that the discipline of comparative religion, or the "science of religions" (*Religionwissenschaft*),²⁹ is thus a purely Muslim contribution

²⁸ "Christ's action was our instruction;" an axiom which appears seventeen times in the works of Aquinas. See: Jean-Pierre Torrell O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Spiritual Master: Saint Thomas d'Aquin, Maître Spirituel vol. II*, translated by Robert Royal (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996) 118.

²⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ed.-in-Chief, *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), xxix.

to the world.³⁰ The founder (واضع) of this field was arguably the polymath Abu Rayhan Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Biruni (d. 440/1048), known as Alberonius in the Occident. Al-Biruni knew several languages including Arabic, Farsi, Hebrew, Syriac, and Sanskrit, and critically studied and wrote about the faith traditions of Christians, Jews, Hindus, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists in his book *Indica (Tarikh al-Hind)*; the first book ever written on the history of religions according to Annemarie Schimmel. Other notable pioneers and luminaries include Al-Mas'udi (d. 345/956), the Kindite philosopher Abu'l Hasan al-Amiri (d. 381/992), Al-Baqillani (d. 403/1013), the Thahirite theologian Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi (d. 456/1064) with his work *The Separator Concerning Nations and Creeds (Al-Fisal fi'l Milal wa'l Nihal)*, and systematic historian Taj al-Din Muhammad al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153), the author of the extraordinary *Book of Nations and Creeds (Kitab al-Milal wa'l Nihal)*. The work of the latter two solidified the literary genre of *Al Milal wa'l Nihal* (الملل و النحل) as part and parcel of the greater Islamic intellectual tradition.³¹

³⁰ See: E. Sharpe, *Comparative Religions: A History*, 2nd. (London: Duckworth, 1986), 111.

³¹ One could make the case that “early church fathers (Gr. *pateres*),” such as Tertullian of Carthage (d. 225 CE), Justin Martyr (d. 165 CE), and Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202), as well as the Cappadocian Fathers (the two Gregories and Basil) were indeed pioneers of comparative religious studies. However, they often employed vitriolic polemical attacks in their apologies of proto-orthodoxy when expounding upon Judaism, and in fact, their attacks were more often than not aimed at other *Christian* groups and heresiarchs such as the Valentinians, Marcionites, or Arians. Gregory of Nazianzus, for instance, said Arius died on the “latrine” (*Or.* 21.13), while Epiphanius considered him “infused with the devil” (*Pan.* 69.12.1). Toom quotes Kannengiesser (*TS*, 1983, 459) who said: “(a) Arius is cited by Athanasius for strictly polemical purposes; (b) most of the quotations are fragmentary; (c) they are transmitted out of context, and exposed to arbitrary changes at the convenience of the citer.” Cf. Tarmo Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007) 78. This patristic method was carried into medieval times. St. John of Damascus (Yuhanna al-Dimashqi, d. 749 CE), also known as John Damascene (Gr. Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνός), was the author of *Concerning Heresies*, a treatise dedicated to refuting heresiarchs and schismatic theologies; its last chapter entitled “Heresy of the Ishmaelites” contains the first ever systematic refutation of Islam. Although John’s work was notably more academic in nature in comparison to his patristic co-religionists, due primarily to his knowledge of Arabic, Caspar suggests that perhaps John actually considered Islam to be a Christian heresy rather than an independent faith tradition. Hence his labeling of Muslims as the “Hagarenes.” There was also Peter the Venerable, the Benedictine Abbot of Cluny (d. 1156) who commissioned Robert of Chester to translate the Qur’an into its first Western language, Latin, in 1142 CE. The translation, initially motivated by the Crusades, was disparagingly titled *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete*

With respect to Islamic biblical *hermeneutics*, however, the breakthrough came with Imam al-Ghazali, the “Proof of Islam.” In addition to authoring the incomparable *Ihya ‘Ulum al-Din* (Islam’s “Summa Theologica”), Ghazali also penned a little known and slightly controversial treatise entitled, *Al-Radd al-Jamil li-Ilaahiyyati ‘Isa bi-Sarih al-Injil*,³² (*The Beautiful Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus by the Explicit Text of the Gospel*) around 1100 CE, perhaps while sojourning in Jerusalem. Ignoring for now the occasional contentions of pseudonymity by contemporary scholarship with respect to this work, Ghazali contends that the Gospel of John explicates upon the *relational* unity (sometimes referred to as “objective *tawhid*”) and mystical union (جمع) between Father and Son, not upon their essential unity/ontological equality. And in addition to the Qur’an and *hadith*, Imam Ghazali also quotes (directly or periphrastically) from the various New Testament Gospels in several of his writings and treatises to further support his arguments concerning what he perceives to be excessive stress on “formalism” and rampant love of mammon amongst the Islamic scholastic community and laity, given the highly spiritual (روحاني) and other-worldly (زهدی) nature of Jesus’ words. Ghazali’s critical engagement with the Gospel of John, specifically, mirrors that of Al-Biruni in the sense that is he both descriptive (objective) as well as evaluative, but he is unique in the sense

(*The Law of Muhammad, the False Prophet*). Peter also wrote two polemical treatises on Islam entitled *Summa Totius Heresis Saracenorum* (*The Summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens*) and the *Liber Contra Sectam Sive Heresim Saracenorum* (*The Refutation of the Sect or Heresy of the Saracens*). Peter also claimed, albeit erroneously, that the Prophet Muhammad died in the year 666 CE. Finally we must make mention of St. Thomas Aquinas’ (d. 1274 CE) *Summa Contra Gentiles* which is sometimes called *Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei Contra Errores Infidelium* (*The Book Concerning the Truth of the Catholic Faith and Errors of the Infidels*) which defends Christianity against Muslims and Jews. None of these Christian works on Islam demonstrate the breadth and depth of Muslim engagement with Christianity found in the writings of Buruni, Ghazali, Shahrastani, Biqa’i, or Ibn Taymiyyah. It wasn’t until the modern period (twentieth century) that we saw more academically sophisticated Christian engagement with Islam, notably with the writings of Massignon, Mubarak, Kung, and Caspar amongst the Catholics, and Cragg, Cantwell Smith, and Watt amongst the Protestants.

³² See: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Al-Radd al-Jamil li-Ilaahiyyati ‘Isa bi-Sarih al-Injil*, M. al-Sharqawi, ed., (Cairo: Dar al-Hidaya, 1986).

that he offers a new way of understanding the text from a *tawhid*-oriented theo-mystical “forestructure.”³³

Polemic, Irenic, and Polemirenic Approaches to the New Testament

Modern Muslim approaches to the New Testament have undertaken diverse ways of engagement. One approach, the polemical, from the Greek πολεμικός meaning “warlike,” is characterized by utilizing the text to formulate zealous refutations of Christian beliefs such as the divine origin of the Bible or the divinity of Christ. Muslim polemicists will also quite often indict the New Testament evangelists with charges of assimilating elements of Paganism into their accounts of the life of Jesus.

Unquestionably, the most famous of contemporary Muslim polemicists was South Africa’s Ahmed Deedat (d. 2005), the winner of the King Faisal International Prize for Islamic *da’wah* (proselytization) in 1986 for “his argumentation against the opponents of Islam,” and founder of the world renown Islamic Propagation Center International (IPCI) in Durban. Deedat’s free and uncopyrighted scathing polemical tractates and pamphlets attacking the Bible as a “fabricated,” “false,” and “filthy” scripture, characterizing it as an anthology of “pornography” and “violence,” coupled with his electrifying stage presence in his numerous debates against the likes of Joshua McDowell, Jimmy Swaggart, and Anis Shorrosh, made him a household name among Muslim and Christian debaters in the 1980’s and 90’s. In his short treatise appropriately entitled *The Combat Kit*, Deedat remarks, “In the current crusade, the Christian world has launched its ‘scud’ missile (The Holy Bible) in two thousand different languages... This manual will enable you to

³³ This is Gadamer’s word. See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London & New York: Continuum, 2004).

convert the Christian scud into a ‘Patriot Missile!’”³⁴ Commenting upon the removal of 1 John 5:7 from the Revised Standard Version (1952), Deedat said, “Thank God! The Christians are nilly-willy discovering pagan forgeries in their ‘Word of God,’ but they are still dragging their feet.”³⁵ Deedat did not have any formal training in Christian theology nor biblical studies/languages and admitted that his lively rhetorical style in which he often incorporated ridicule and sarcasm to elicit laughter from his audiences was the result of a chip on his shoulder which he acquired while working as a young man at a place called Adam’s Mission Station in which future “men of the cloth” would attack him, his religion, and his Prophet. Deedat admitted that his greatest influence was Rahmatullah’s *Izhar al-Haqq* “the seminal work for modern Muslim refutation of Christianity” according to Zebiri, and “a product of nineteenth-century Muslim-Christian debates in India and more specifically a response to the German missionary Carl Pfander’s *The Balance of Truth*.”³⁶

In fact, most Muslim polemicists are not actually scholars of religion, they are often lay professional engineers, physicians, and lawyers who have arrived at their work through personal study and reflection. And we often see that when Muslim polemicists have just enough knowledge and motivation to be dangerous, they tend to fall into the unfortunate abyss of misrepresentation. Deedat, for instance, is incessant that Christians believe that Jesus was the result of a sexual relationship between God and Mary³⁷ because the Nicene Creed says “begotten not made” (γεννηθεντα ου ποιηθεντα) and

³⁴ Ahmed Deedat, *The Choice: Islam and Christianity*, Vol. 1-2 (South Africa: IPCI, 1994), 36.

³⁵ *ibid*, 71.

³⁶ Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face*, 47.

³⁷ This seems to be the teaching of the Mormon (LDS) Church, sometimes referred to as “The Doctrine of the Heavenly Incest.” See: Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 1966.

justifies his position by quoting Luke 1:35 in which we are told that the Holy Spirit will “come upon” (ἐπελεύσεται) and “overshadow” (ἐπισκιάσει) Mary.³⁸ The pseudo-scholarship of another polemicist, ‘Ata ur-Rahim, is also demonstrated in his famous book *Jesus: Prophet of Islam*: “In 325 A.D., the famous Council of Nicea was held. The doctrine of the Trinity was declared to be the official doctrine of the Pauline Church, and one of the consequences of this decision was that out of the three hundred or so Gospels extant at that time, four were chosen as the official Gospels of the Church. The remaining Gospels, including the Gospel of Barnabas, were ordered to be completely destroyed.”³⁹ Reading such a claim compels me to quote Christian apologist Dinesh D’Souza, who once prefaced his rebuttal of Christopher Hitchens by saying, “I feel like a mosquito in a nudist colony; I don’t know where to begin.” Abd al-Qadir as-Sufi makes the following caricature of Christianity in ‘Ata ur-Rahim’s introduction, “(It) is a religion which at the popular level celebrates its two central rites by tying gifts to a fir tree and rolling eggs down the hill, and at the intellectual level *no longer exists at all*”⁴⁰ (emphasis mine).

Thus when I use the term “polemical,” I am using it to refer to an approach to the biblical text that is marked by a lack of substantive study in Christian history, Christian thought, Christology, biblical studies/languages, and constantly feels compelled to refute the notion that the Bible is a divinely-inspired book by often resorting to ridicule, simplistic deconstructions, misrepresentations, unsubstantial claims, and pseudo-scholarship. The Bible is read by these Muslims for two reasons: to attack it or use it to

³⁸ Ehrman also suggests that the pre-Christian Pagan belief of a deity cohabiting with a mortal woman and producing a demigod child was assimilated by the author of Luke. See Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

³⁹ Muhammad ‘Ata ur-Rahim, *Jesus: Prophet of Islam* (New York: Tahrike Tarsil Qur’an, 1991), 40. For a firsthand account of Nicea see: Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, Book III chapters IV-VII, X-XIV.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, 6.

attack Christian beliefs/practices; almost nothing positive is offered. Thus John is obviously wrong by attributing a statement to Jesus in which he “insults” his mother at a wedding where “haram” wine is involved (John 2), but at the same time, he faithfully records Jesus referring to “the Father” (another heresy) as “the only true God” (τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν [John 17:3]). Thus John is wrong and so are Christians, on John’s authority. Muslim polemicists find their counterparts amongst Christian writers such as Robert Spencer, author of *Did Muhammad Exist?*, *The Truth About Muhammad*, and *The Complete Infidels’ Guide to the Koran*, Robert Morey and his *Islamic Invasion*, and Norman Geisler’s famous *Answering Islam*.

Another modern Muslim approach to the Bible, the irenical, from the Greek εἰρήνη meaning, “peace,” does not attempt to refute Christian theology nor pick and choose from the text. In fact, it does not seem that *tahrif* at any level is acknowledged at all. One such group, the Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chretien (GRIC) justified their positions by stating that “Islam does not have a magisterium to legitimate one opinion or another.”⁴¹ The aim here is to harmonize or syncretize the New Testament with the Qur’an, and claim that both religions could be understood as teaching the very *same* theology albeit with different technical terminology and diverse pedagogical methods. Thus the difference between Augustine’s (d. 430 CE) conception of the Trinity in his *De Trinitate* and classical *Tawhid* as articulated by Abu Ja’far al-Tahawi (d. 321/933) or Abu’l Hasan al-Ash’ari (d. 324/936) is simply a matter of semantics; they are two sides of the same coin. The shortcomings of the irenical approach are many. First, while it is true that there is no magisterium in Islam, there *is* a very strong emphasis on *Ijma’*

⁴¹ Quoted from Zebiri, *Muslim and Christians Face to Face*, 163.

(consensus) and *Jama'ah* (majority) that helps establish a normative tradition; a tradition, however, vast in its scope of opinions. Second, it gives a woefully inaccurate and misleading impression of historical Christianity. The Christological pronouncements of the Nicene Creed describing Jesus as “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, co-substantial with the Father” (θεον εκ θεων, φως εκ φωτος, θεον αληθινον εκ θεου αληθινου, γεννηθεντα ου ποιηθεντα, ομοουσιον τω πατρι) simply cannot be harmonized with the Qur'an's absolute and unequivocal statements about Christ despite all of the creative syntactical and theological gymnastics. From Augustine to Aquinas, all claimed that Jesus was God, or “Allah;” in Islam Jesus is not God (Cf. Q 5:17) - somebody got it wrong. Third, this approach cannot adequately account for the Qur'an's clear condemnations of Trinitarian theology, begotten sonship, and Incarnation if the issue is simply rooted in semantics. Although there may be some wiggle room in the Qur'an's wording with respect to the “end” of Jesus' earthly life, as some scholars such as Ayoub, Reynolds, and Lawson contend that the Qur'an may not negate Jesus' crucifixion, death, and possible resurrection, radical revisionist reinterpretations of clear Qur'anic condemnations of Trinitarian theology⁴² as well as denying the post-apostolic Church's stance that Jesus is God is to misrepresent the faith of billions of people. Fourth, due to the constant attempts of “challenging the boundaries of religious identity” and “blurring the lines between religious traditions,” the “overwhelming majority of Muslims, including comparatively liberal thinkers”⁴³ would recoil from such syncretist ideas which, in addition, resemble the unfounded claims of the

⁴² For instance, to say something like, “The Qur'an only criticizes Christian *language* with respect to God” when it says, ‘And don't say ‘Trinity;’ it is better for you...’” (Q 4:171.5), meaning it is only preferable to abstain from such misleading terms, but in reality Trinity and *Tawhid* are identical.”

⁴³ Zebiri, *Muslim and Christians Face to Face*, 166.

modern Perennialists and notorious *mutasawwifin* (secular antinomian Sufis), or pseudo-Sufis. For example, Lombard, one of the general editors of *The Study Qur'an*, claims that the Qur'an (with specific reference to Q 5:73), "does not oppose the various forms of orthodox Trinitarian doctrines that prevailed for most of Christian history. Rather, it appears to oppose crude misunderstandings of it that would lead one to believe that there are three gods instead of one," and that this is "not a direct condemnation of Christian theology."⁴⁴ Lombard then quotes the beginning of the Nicene Creed to demonstrate that Trinitarians still believe in "one God,"⁴⁵ yet chooses to ignore descriptions of the "Son" as being "true God from true God," co-substantial (*homoousios*) with the Father, and "co-worshipped." He further says in his commentary of Q 5:17: "When the Qur'an criticizes the belief that 'God is the Messiah,' one could argue that it is not criticizing official Christian doctrine (which might say that the Messiah is God, but not that God is the Messiah), but rather an exaggerated and thus unorthodox understanding of Christ's nature," an understanding that "would limit God's Being to His manifestation in a human being (Christ)."⁴⁶ These assertions are certainly problematic when viewed from a traditional Sunni theo-mystical lens. Although I would agree that Trinitarianism is not *blatant* polytheism but rather monotheism, or more accurately "Trinitarian monotheism" as opposed to "Unitarian monotheism," the latter being what I consider to be the theology espoused by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, i.e. God is the Monad, radically one (*Wahid*) in the godhead, while the former espouses multiplicity in the godhead and often seems to be rather a *veiled* Tritheism. The irenic Muslim reader of the New Testament does not

⁴⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ed.-in-Chief, *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary*, 1779.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 285.

speak from a normative position.

A third modern Muslim approach to the Bible, which I call the *polemirenic*, stands between the extreme methods of the polemicists and irenicists. Like the polemical but unlike the irenic, the *polemirenic* approach attempts to read and interpret the biblical text through the lens of normative Islam where major theological differences between Islam and Christianity are admitted and *tahrif*, whether at the textual or interpretive level, is affirmed. But unlike the polemical and like the irenic, the *polemirenic* is characterized by academic sophistication and rigorous scholarship of the Bible, Christianity, biblical languages, and/or the historical critical method, and may include an attempt to harmonize the Christology of the Bible with the Qur'an, albeit under the framework of Islamic normativity. Muslim *polemirenic* engagement with the Bible does not preclude the formulation of refutations; unlike phenomenology, evaluation is indispensable and hermeneutics are performed within traditional parameters. Zebiri notes that the great pioneers of *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* literature, Al-Biruni, Al-Baqillani, Ibn Qayyim, and Ghazali are often labeled as “polemicists” because of their engagements in refutations, “but this concern did not necessarily exclude a full and accurate exposition of others’ religious beliefs, which was sometimes apparently motivated by a genuine disinterested curiosity.”⁴⁷ These men were actually the *polemirenicists* of the classical Islamic period. It is my contention that modern-day Muslim *polemirenic* engagement with the New Testament is a highly effective way of articulating the Qur'an-based faith convictions and scholarly assertions of traditional Muslims with respect to the *Injil* and historical Christianity in a language and demeanor that encourages healthy, honest, and

⁴⁷ Zebiri, *Muslim and Christians Face to Face*, 138.

substantive discourse between Muslim and Christians. In his *Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, I believe that Pope Francis I advocates such *polemirenicism* when he says, “In this dialogue, ever friendly and sincere, attention must also be paid to the essential bond between dialogue and proclamation, which leads the Church to maintain and intensify her relationship with non-Christians. A facile syncretism would ultimately be a totalitarian gesture on the part of those who would ignore greater values of which they are not the masters. True openness involves remaining steadfast in one’s deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one’s own identity, while at the same time being ‘open to understanding those of the other party’ and ‘knowing that dialogue can enrich each side.’ What is not helpful is a diplomatic openness which says ‘yes’ to everything in order to avoid problems, for this would be a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others. Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another.”

A step in the right direction with respect to academic rigor and competency of the Bible came with Isma’il al-Faruqi (d. 1986), a Palestinian Muslim exile who studied for some time under Wilfred Cantwell-Smith, and author of *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of its Dominant Ideas* and *On Arabism*. Al-Faruqi contends that the New Testament Gospels contain the “essence” of Christ’s original ethical message, and that it is possible to rediscover that message by practising “*epoche*,” that is, “faith-bracketing,” which will be discussed later. By employing his own internal methodology, Al-Faruqi claims that he was able to detangle the original message from what he calls “unchristian accretions,”⁴⁸ and blames the corruption, or “transvaluation” of Christian

⁴⁸ Isma’il al-Faruqi, *On Arabism: ‘Urubah and Religion* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1962), 58.

ethics⁴⁹ on Paul and the post-apostolic proto-orthodox⁵⁰ formulators of Trinitarian theology. Despite Al-Faruqi's less polemical and more academic approach to the New Testament, he simply "does not measure up to the level (Muslims) attained in the medieval period, when Muslims were among the most accomplished historians of religion."⁵¹ Al-Faruqi also lacked a substantively in-depth education in Christian thought/theology and was not conversant with either biblical Hebrew or Greek, and made no attempt at textual criticism.

More recently, Reza Aslan's novel-esque book *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* (2013) proposes that "the Jesus before Christianity" was a "zealous revolutionary" who called for regime change, the end of Roman occupation, and the dissolution of the corrupt aristocratic priesthood.⁵² Jesus was rightfully crucified by Roman authorities for sedition against the state, but was later mythicized by his bewildered followers trying to make sense of his death. Hence Aslan reconstructs the old "quester's" dichotomy between the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the mythical Jesus Christ of the Gospels. Aslan's theory is nothing new. S.G.F. Brandon suggested that Jesus was a proto-Zealot revolutionary in his 1967 book *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity*. However, Aslan is unique amongst Muslim scholars of the Bible because unlike Al-Faruqi, he is well-schooled in biblical Greek, Christian origins, and his theory is fully-rooted in the historical critical method, explaining in his introduction that he gives precedence (priority) to the Gospel of Mark

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 58.

⁵⁰ This term was coined by Ehrman. See: Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁵¹ Zebiri, *Muslim and Christians Face to Face*, 137.

⁵² Reza Aslan, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Random House, 2013), xxviii.

and Q source material - the “Two-Source Theory” - and is thus much more sophisticated than his polemical co-religionists who tend to memorize one-liners from Deedat’s *Combat Kit*. For Aslan, placing Jesus in his social, cultural, and theological context allows him to “purge the scriptures” of “theological flourishes” and arrive at the historical itinerant preacher from Galilee.⁵³ Unfortunately, however, Aslan’s portrayal of Jesus is spiritually anemic, and while it may be said that his work is *polemirenic* in the sense that it is academically rigorous, it is difficult to situate him within normative Muslim parameters. Aslan’s faith-bracketing methodology precludes him from speaking directly about the Qur’anic *Injil*; does he affirm its Archetype as reflected in the canonical gospels, or believe something else? When he affirms the Crucifixion, is he speaking from the vantage point of a historian, or as a believing Muslim? Explicit engagement with the Qur’an and Islamic theology/Christology would have been helpful. Aslan makes a point that he is a “Muslim scholar of religions” in his interviews, and while he does mention that he is seeking the “historical Jesus” in *Zealot*, it would have been nice to see his own faith in Jesus reflected more fully in his work. Alas, Aslan’s faith convictions remain elusive causing frustration from his Muslim readers who wonder about his normativity, and suspicion from his non-Muslim readers who wonder if his historical analysis and theory is actually a ploy for some “Muslim agenda.” Finally, Aslan, as would be expected, does not take the Gospel of John very seriously and accepts the premise that “in John’s view, Jesus is an eternal being,”⁵⁴ thus affirming what most post-apostolic proto-orthodox authorities have concluded about John. However, if Aslan was consistent with his method of situating Jesus in his *sitz im leben*, he would have

⁵³ *ibid*, xxxi.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, 28-29.

discovered an alternate way of understanding the Logos within the religious context of first-century Palestinian and Egyptian Judaism. Namely, the Logos as God's created wisdom (*hokma*, חכמה), mentioned in Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, and the Wisdom of Solomon, acting as God's intermediary as well as His channel of communication to humanity, according to Philo Judaeus (d. 50 CE).

The Myth of "Objectivity" in New Testament Interpretation

The "quest for the historical Jesus," started by nineteenth-century German scholarship, attempts to "objectively" reconstruct the real man of history, Jesus of Nazareth, by applying the tools of modern biblical criticism and historiography to the New Testament. There are several issues here, first and perhaps most importantly, does objectivity even exist? (I am using the term objective in the sense of being unbiased). Is it even *possible* to historically examine the New Testament Gospels by bracketing-off one's faith/beliefs/assumptions/prejudices? Are historians somehow immune to these things? Is there a way to arrive at some faith-neutral "pure Jesus history,"⁵⁵ to use Schneiders' phrase, through an objective analysis? How does one attempt to separate the "true Jesus" from the "mythical Jesus" by examining documents "non-theologically" that were written for the *sole purpose of communicating theological truth*? "Granted that they are written in specific times and places, these historically located and shaped documents were all produced by authors who held certain convictions and who sought to bring others to adopt or reaffirm their fundamental commitments."⁵⁶ Take the Gospel of John, for

⁵⁵ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, xxiii.

⁵⁶ Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading" in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 233.

instance. The evangelist confesses towards the end of his Gospel:⁵⁷ “These things have been written *so that you might believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and believing, you may have life in his name” (ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύσητε ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ [John 20:31]). According to Harpur, this was “meant not to impart history but to buttress and convey belief.”⁵⁸ Aslan and other “faith-bracketers” may make the argument that Jesus stormed the Temple in Jerusalem because he was a nationalist revolutionary, and that this event is therefore “historical,” but how do they know that the evangelists did not simply invent this episode to make a theological point? In which case, the story would have to be rejected along with all the healings, raisings, and walkings on water. They *assume* it to be true, because it supports their argument. Perhaps the cleansing of the Temple, or *haykal* in Hebrew, is a metaphor for *catharsis* (Lat. *via purgativa*; Ar. *takhliya*), the first step of the mystical path to union with God. The word *haykal* is also the word for “body” in Hebrew; thus the “cleansing of the Temple” means to purify the body, or self (שׁוֹמֵר), from the love of money (φιλαργυρία), the “root of all evil” (ρίζα πάντων τῶν κακῶν), according to Paul (1 Tim. 6:10.1). Continuing with this analogy, the innermost sanctuary of the Temple, the “holy of holies” (*qadosh ha qadoshim*), where the high priest would pronounce “the Name” (*Ha Shem*), is analogous to the human heart (*layn*) which overflows with the love and remembrance of God. Therefore, it is faith in Jesus which allows the heart to be purified of spiritual disease - Jesus storms the Temple.

The four evangelists wrote their histories of Jesus through the lens of their

⁵⁷ Many scholars (Bultmann) contend that John 20:31 is the true ending of John; chapter 21 was added later by a redactor as an epilogue.

⁵⁸ Tom Harpur, *The Pagan Christ: Is Blind Faith Killing Christianity?* (New York: Walker & Company, 2004), 125.

theology; theology always comes first. Schneiders says, “The ‘problem’ (which is really a problem for the post-Enlightenment historical ‘quester’) is that the evangelists never intended, or claimed, to present the historical Jesus to their readers. They told the Jesus-story, which included historical material. But that material was so suffused with theological interpretation, faith claims about Jesus, and lived experience of the post-Easter Jesus in the Christian community, that extracting the ‘historical Jesus’ from their accounts is actually only partially possible.”⁵⁹ The author of John, for instance, tells us that the Last Supper occurred the night before the Passover, not the night of the Passover, as in the Synoptic tradition. Therefore, Jesus is crucified on Thursday Nisan 14, when the lambs were being slaughtered, not Friday Nisan 15, the sacred time for Passover observance. John is making a theological point here. “Faith created these texts, and they intend to speak to and mediate faith.”⁶⁰ In fact, many historians *agree* with John regarding the day of the Crucifixion, citing that the Synoptic version, although multiply-attested, seems highly unlikely. The evangelists “were engaged in a type of Midrash, an inspired commentary” which “expounded spiritual truths through a retelling of Scripture.”⁶¹ Thus the historical Jesus is a “literary construction,” the *highly speculative* creation of the historian who makes Jesus “in his own image;” picking and choosing what he considers relevant from the Gospels.⁶² The myth of interpretive unbiased objectivity is thus evident in the very fact that historians, working with the same materials, often end up saying very different things about Jesus: Jesus was a proto-Zealot; a Pharisee; an apocalyptic charismatic; an eschatological prophet; a Jewish Cynic teacher; a Stoic

⁵⁹ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, xxvi.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, xxv.

⁶¹ Harpur, *The Pagan Christ: Is Blind Faith Killing Christianity?*, 152-153.

⁶² Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, xxvi.

philosopher; etc. To engage with the New Testament while claiming hundred-percent objectively (that is to say without bias), is to engage in an exercise in futility. Even Aslan concedes, “Granted, writing a biography of Jesus of Nazareth is not like writing a biography of Napoleon Bonaparte. The task is somewhat akin to putting together a massive puzzle with only a few of the pieces in hand; one has no choice but to fill in the rest of the puzzle based on the best, most educated guess of what the completed image should look like. The great Christian theologian Rudolf Bultmann liked to say that the quest for the historical Jesus is ultimately an internal quest. Scholars tend to see the Jesus they want to see. Too often they see *themselves* - their own reflection - in the image of Jesus they have constructed” (emphasis Aslan’s);⁶³ “presuppositionless” interpretation does not exist.⁶⁴ The best we can do is provide our evidence with academic rigor and allow our positions to be challenged or revised. Thompson says summarizing Watson: “All interpretation proceeds within some framework: there is no a priori reason that Christian confession cannot provide that framework for reading the Christian Scriptures. In that sense, Christian confession has a hermeneutical function.”⁶⁵ As a Muslim who believes (confesses) that the Gospel of John *is the very Injil*, thus *my* text, “there is no reason that [Muslim] confession cannot provide [a] framework for reading [Muslim] Scripture.” I agree with Evans who says: “Biblical scholarship should be reconceived as a conversation or dialogue between communities of scholars that approach the evidence

⁶³ Aslan, *Zealot*, xxxi.

⁶⁴ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, xxx.

⁶⁵ Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 235. Cf. Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 241.

with different presuppositional frameworks.”⁶⁶

“Given the subject matter of the biblical text whose intention is to evoke, nourish, and strengthen faith, banishing faith from the conversation is counterintuitive and even violent. The biblical interpreter needs and has a right to the explicit functioning of her or his faith in the task of interpretation.”⁶⁷ Schneiders, following Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (d. 2002) remarkable *Truth and Method*, maintains that understanding and interpretation of the biblical text are inseparable. We are constantly “fusing” our world with the world of the text, which in turn, creates meaning and transformation - a “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*). The biblical interpreter is thus in a constant dialogical relationship with the text. Our prejudices do not hinder proper interpretation of the text, but are a necessary and indispensable requisite of it. In many instances our confession provides “fruitful prejudices.”⁶⁸ For Gadamer, *everyone* inevitably brings their own prejudices to bear upon the text, and those “enlightened” thinkers and “objective” historians who think of themselves immune to this, are guilty of a “prejudice against prejudices.”⁶⁹ Gadamer’s thoughts are often placed in juxtaposition to those of Friedrich Schleiermacher (d. 1834), sometimes referred to the father of hermeneutics, who believed that the correct interpretation of a text could only come by intuiting the intention of the original autograph author. Schleiermacher’s notion may be akin to the Islamic concept of *tafsir bi’l isharah* (esoteric/mystical exegesis), in which the interpreter of the Qur’an taps

⁶⁶ C. Stephen Evans, “The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: From What Perspective Should It Be Assessed?” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 117. Cf. Ronald Feenstra, “Critical Studies of the New Testament,” in *Between Hermes and Athena*, in ‘*Behind*’ the Text: *History and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, C. Stephen Evans, and Murray Rae (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004).

⁶⁷ Aslan, *Zealot*, xxxvii.

⁶⁸ Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 235.

⁶⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 273.

into its true meanings due to his heart being opened by God. Such providential intuition or divination can perhaps be seen, for example, in Ghazali's comment that Moses stripped himself of "the two worlds" when he removed his sandals in the sacred valley of *Tuwa*; a symbolic action indicating his devotion to God and obedience for His sake alone, according to Ghazali, and not for the sake of the ephemeral things of this world (one sandal) nor for the other-worldly delights of the Hereafter (the other sandal).⁷⁰ Islam's normative theology, however, is built upon clear proof-texts in the Qur'an that are fundamentally established in meaning (المحكمات) that act as anchors, as it were, compelling the interpreter of the text to stay within certain hermeneutical parameters. Thus passages that imply any sort of anthropomorphism (المتشابهات) such as, "The hand (يد) of God is above their hands" (Q 48:10.1), are interpreted in light of the clear verses, the theological anchors of the Qur'an, such as "There is nothing like Him at all" (ليس كمثله [Q 42:11.5]). Thus for an exegete to claim that God possesses a physical hand, made of matter, and contained in space/time, or that Muhammad is a divine incarnation in the literal sense, is to transgress the normative boundaries of Islamic theology as understood by nearly all Sunnite Muslim theologians. In other words, there has always been a claim in the scholarly circles of Islamic traditionalism that the original intent of the Qur'an's author, God, is understood. This is precisely what establishes normativity. According to Ehrman, early proto-orthodox Christian figures, many of whom regularly engaged in mystical or figurative exegesis, accused certain Gnostics of breaching the plain meanings of texts in order to justify polytheistic notions of fallen aeons and such. For these figures,

⁷⁰ Al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights*, translated by David Buchman (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), ??

i.e. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, there is *obviously* one God who created all.⁷¹ Thus primacy must be given to literal interpretations unless “the text appeared hopelessly contradictory or absurd.”⁷² For the proto-orthodox, “Scripture was to be interpreted following literal methods of interpretation, that is to say, letting the words say what they normally mean, and following widely accepted practices of grammatical construction. When they are so interpreted, the words yield the meaning of the author.”⁷³ This all sounds good, but ironically, I would accuse the proto-orthodox of violating their own rule with respect to giving primacy to the plain meaning, i.e. John 17:1-3 and John 1:1, the former clearly referring to the *Father* as “the only true God,” and the latter which calls the Logos *theos* (a god), *never ho theos (the God)* - a word (*theos*) used for *Moses* dozens of times by Philo, the first-century Hellenistic Jewish philosopher;⁷⁴ a word (*theos*) used in the Johannine Prologue - a text which echoes the Dualism of the texts at Qumran, written by rigidly monotheistic Jews.

The transcendent nature of Revelation, however, does not preclude the exegete from discovering divinely intended meanings, which are infinite according to many scholars, by bringing his own unique forestructure, that is, his specific biases, prejudices, experiences, his very *Weltanschauung* to bear upon the text. In other words, I do not see the basic approaches of Gadamer and Schleiermacher as being mutually exclusive as Schneider does; *Horizontverschmelzung* may be a *means* to the actualization of original authorial meanings because the author of the text is God, and God’s word is valid for all

⁷¹ Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 195-197.

⁷² Origen, *On First Principles*, book 4, quoted from Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 197.

⁷³ *ibid.* According to Eusebius of Caesarea, Origen, although prone to rich metaphorical exegesis, took Jesus’ advice in Matthew 19:12 to heart, and *literally* castrated himself. See: Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*.

⁷⁴ See: Philo, *De vita Mosis (Life of Moses)*.

times. While I agree that among confessional authors, “there is no agreement about what they are or how one undertakes a ‘theological reading,’”⁷⁵ I would contend that as long as the exegete stays normative, diverse *shades* of these meanings may be brought to the surface depending on his or her given hermeneutic. Thus Schneiders’ feminist interpretation of John 4 as a passage “characterized by an astonishing, even shocking, inclusiveness” in which a woman, “the universal representative of the despised and excluded ‘other’ not only in ancient Israel but throughout history and all over the world... is made an active participant in the establishment of the universal reign of the Savior of the world,”⁷⁶ may be exactly a shade of what the Holy Spirit intended to convey through John nearly two-thousand years ago and unveiled, or “revealed,” in 1999 through Sandra Schneiders. Thus I agree with Thompson and Watson, contra Stendahl,⁷⁷ that theological readings must be descriptive *as well as* prescriptive; they must describe what the text *meant* as well as what it *means*.⁷⁸ While the latter is generally “eschewed in biblical studies,” without it, the study of texts can simply “be handed off to the historian.”⁷⁹ In the same way, the theo-mystical meditations of Ghazali, Junayd, and Ibn al-‘Arabi with respect to Islam, their derived Sufi hermeneutic, may also uncover nuances and shades of authorial meaning in the Gospel of John that have laid dormant until now that have *great significance for modern Muslim readers*, that is of course, if I consider the text of the Gospel as a Revelation, and I am able to situate myself within the normative exegetical

⁷⁵ Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 233.

⁷⁶ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 196-197.

⁷⁷ See: Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), vol. 1, 418-432.

⁷⁸ Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 233-234.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

tradition.

“Non-theological” Studies of the Qur’an?

Contemporary Islamicist Carl Ernst contends that the Qur’an should be studied “like any other book,” non-theologically. The Qur’an, however, is not like any other book. It claims itself to be a divine Revelation. Thus *all* approaches to the Qur’an, even those that claim non-theology, will have at the very *least*, significant theological implications. In his book *How to Read the Qur’an*, which he considers to be an extension of Theodor Noldeke’s (d. 1930) standard text *Geschichte des Qorans* (1938), Ernst is not *explicitly* theological in the sense that he does not reveal his personal faith convictions nor does he plainly express his judgment as to whether the Qur’an is a Revelation or not, but one thing is certain, he is “theologizing” at some level. All historians have theological beliefs/biases whether theistic, atheistic, or agnostic; non-theological engagement with Scripture simply does not exist. To demonstrate my point, if Richard Dawkins happened to have a PhD in ancient Near-Eastern history (to go along with all of his other degrees) and announced that he wanted to conduct an “historical non-theological faith-bracketing study” of the Old Testament, would we expect him, despite his erudition, to be unbiased? - a man who once described the god of the Old Testament as “arguably the most unpleasant character is all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive blood-thirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, racist, homophobic, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”⁸⁰

⁸⁰ See: Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: First Mariner, 2008).

Ernst's suggestion that verse 31 of *Surah* 74 (*al-Mudaththir*) was a "later (Medinan) addition," may very well be true, in fact the phenomenon of Medinan *ayat* in Meccan *suwar* is well established in classical Muslim scholarship. However, Ernst also suggests that the addition of the verse compromises the coherent structure of the *Surah*, and should thus be removed. Feeling almost as if he needs to reassure his Muslim readers, he adds that "the Prophet" may have placed the verse there, and not some later scribe. This however leaves the Muslim with the uncomfortable thought that the Prophet was not aware of the *Surah*'s coherent structure; and if structure is of tantamount importance for understanding the universal messages the Qur'an, as suggested by Ernst, then the classical Islamic doctrine of *tabligh*, or (correct) conveyance of the message as an obligation for prophets, must be reassessed. Ernst also notices an intertextuality that occurs between Q 5:15 in which the Prophet is called "a light from God" (مِنْ أَلْهِ نُورٌ) and the Qur'an "a clear Revelation" (كِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ) and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29-32), especially v.32.1 in which Jesus is called "a light for bringing a revelation to the nations" (φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἔθνῶν). Ernst accounts for the parallelism by stating that the Prophet must have been familiar with both Christian Scriptures as well as with Christian liturgy. Thus Ernst echoes the "Dialogic Principle" of Angelika Neuwirth, the research director of the Corpus Coranicum Research Project⁸¹ (founded in Berlin in 2007) who espouses that the Qur'an is a product of the theological debates raging during the milieu of Late Antiquity. And like Michael Marx of the CCRP who stated that the goal of the project was to demonstrate a "shared Middle-Eastern heritage between Jews, Christians, and Muslims," Ernst hopes that his book will indicate the "important links that tie the

⁸¹ See: <http://en.qantara.de/content/the-koran-as-a-text-from-late-antiquity-a-european-approach>.

Qur'an to the legacy of a shared civilization."⁸² While Ernst is adamant that he is not denying the possibility that the Qur'an is a revelation from God, thus implying that the theological debates of the Prophet's day simply provided the *Sitz im Leben*, or *asbab an-nuzul* (called "historical contextualizations" by Lumbard), if you will, of the Qur'an's revelatory affirmations and correctives, anyone can certainly see that his "policy of Duhemian neutrality"⁸³ carries with it major theological implications.

Methodology 1: Polemirenic Textual-Affirmative Approach

Since Ghazali's time, *traditional* Muslim scholastics (العلماء) have been extremely hesitant about substantial engagement with the Bible (in general) other than to either simply dismiss it *a priori in toto* as a corrupted and abrogated text or to mirror the tactics of Western Orientalism with respect to the Qur'an and *Sirah* by unfairly exploiting the biblical text for disingenuous polemical aims,⁸⁴ as mentioned earlier. Certain contemporary Muslim biblicists and apologists, however, echo something of Ghazali's hermeneutical method by engaging with the New Testament on *strictly* theological grounds with the Qur'an (and *Sunnah*, Prophetic Precedent) acting as (a) theological measuring stick(s). Thus, these biblicists are quick to point to the descriptions of the Paraclete of Jesus' Final Discourse (John chapters 14-17), for instance, as being obvious descriptions of Christ's successor Muhammad, or rather Ahmad, in light of Q 61:6. By doing so, they authenticate a portion of the text of John where it suits their theological

⁸² Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, 19.

⁸³ C. Stephen Evans, "The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: From What Perspective Should It Be Assessed?" in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 116.

⁸⁴ For an interesting response to the classical Orientalists see: Muhammad Mohar Ali, *The Qur'an and the Orientalists: An Examination of their Theories and Assumptions* (Ipswich: Jami'yat Ihyaa Minhaaj al-Sunnah, 2004).

purposes, implicitly deeming it the very *Injil* referenced in the Qur'an, yet they cannot reconcile other passages which seem to fly into the face of acceptable “normative” Islamic theology such as John's declaration that “[and] the word was God” (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος [John 1:1.9]) or Jesus claiming equality with God (“The Father and I are One,” ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἓν ἐσμεν [John 10:30]). The quick answer here from such Muslim biblicists is that these particular statements are obviously fabrications due to their contravening of the Qur'an, thus indicative of the Islamic doctrine of biblical corruption (*tahrif*). How, when, and by whom such corruption took place is not essential for these readers. The Muslim is then free to pick and choose what he likes from the biblical text, pejoratively referred to as “cherry-picking” or “salad bar hermeneutics” by some Christian apologists.

This methodology, which I have called “partial textual authentication prompted by belief in the textually corrupted *Injil*,” however, puts the Muslim reader in a highly defensive and awkward position. First of all, it is the Qur'an itself that condemns those who “believe in parts of the Bible and disbelieve in other (parts)” (Q 2:85.5) Also, when the Qur'an speaks of “the Gospel” (*al-Injil*, الانجيل), alludes to its passages by saying, “And *remember* when Jesus, the son of Mary said...” (وَإِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ), chastises the Christians for failing to recognize Muhammad as a prophet since they are “witnesses” to the truth (Q 3:70), and commands Christians to abide by the “Gospel's” principles and to judge the contents of the Qur'an by “what God revealed” in the “Gospel” (Q 5:47), is God really referring to a corrupt and heretical text? Consider also the Prophet's Covenant with the monks of Mount Sinai in which he guarantees the fair treatment of “those who

follow the precepts of the Gospel.”⁸⁵ The only “Gospel” the monks followed was enshrined in the New Testament. When the Prophet Muhammad received his initial call to prophecy, several sound narrations in Bukhari mention that Waraqah “used to write *the Gospel* (الإنجيل) in Arabic and Hebrew/Syriac.” This is obviously a reference to the New Testament. Perhaps there is a double misunderstanding here; one on the part of proto-orthodox/orthodox Christianity that has deemed Christ God, and one on the part of the Muslim intellectual who has accepted the orthodox interpretations *a priori*. In other words, if the Gospel that the Qur’an is referencing is in fact the first four books of the New Testament, there may be *nothing* in the canonical gospels that contradicts anything in the Qur’an, and Ghazali’s textual affirmative approach needs to be revitalized in our modern day by Muslims who are conversant with Christian origins, comparative Christologies, biblical Greek, and Islam’s theo-mystical tradition. The effects of such work on the Academy could indeed be paradigm shifting.

Notwithstanding several fascinating similarities, I am not saying, however, that Christianity and Islam are basically saying the same things. Such syncretistic ideas of Muslim irenicists, prevalent and commonplace in the Far Eastern religious traditions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, are certainly interesting, but simply not realistic of Islam and Christianity, two religions that make absolute truth claims. The “proclaimed Jesus”⁸⁶ of the Christian churches and synods is the second person of a triune godhead who died and vicariously atones for the sins of humanity, and the parallels between this proclaimed Jesus of Trinitarian orthodoxy, the Λόγος, and the Islamic

⁸⁵ John Andrew Morrow, *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the World* (Angelico Press/Sophia Perennis, 2013), 209.

⁸⁶ Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, xxvii.

concept of *Kalam* (كلام) as a pre-eternal and uncreated attribute of God are only sustainable to a point. Ultimately, the Christian Jesus distinguishes himself as a separate and distinct “person” (υποτασις), “co-substantial” (ομοουσιος) with the Father, and fully God;⁸⁷ this is not merely a matter of semantics. I am also not saying that there is some elusive transcendent truth or meta-disciple out there that supersedes all religions that only a select few have been privileged enough to envisage and realize. Such notions, indicative of the Perennialist Philosophy, caught fire early, but is now being more and more scrutinized by seasoned theologians of various religions due to its lack of evidence.⁸⁸ What I *am* saying is that the “textual Jesus,” that is to say, the Jesus of the New Testament Gospels, preached metaphysical truth about God. The textual Jesus, pre-patristic/Nicene, was the Messenger of Allah who delivered the Gospel to the people of Palestine some 2,000 years ago; the Gospel, or “good news,” of a mystical teaching, “Jewish Sufism” if you will, rooted in the Messianic Precedent, annihilated in the love of Christ, and offering a road map to humanity’s greatest beatitude, mystical union (Gr. *theosis*; Lat. *unio mystica*; Ar. *jama’*) and friendship with God (Gr. *philia*; Lat. *amiticia*; Ar. *wilayah*) and eternal life with Him upon mortal death. He taught us to be illuminated reflections of God’s very ethos, just as he was, or to put it Qur’anicly, he commanded “Be lordly” (كُونُوا رَبَّيْنَ) [3:79.5]. Nowhere is this teaching more apparent than in the *Gospel of John*. While most Muslim scholars describe the message of Christ as one that emphasized the importance of other-worldliness (زهد), selflessness (ايثار), and love of God (محبة), all Sufi virtues, it follows then that the best Gospel to analyze in terms of

⁸⁷ Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Graecos*.

⁸⁸ For a scathing review see: Syed Muhammad Naquib al-'Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (UTM, 2014), 7-12.

understanding the core teachings of Christ for *Muslims* is not Matthew, but John, the εὐαγγέλιον πνευματικόν;⁸⁹ the same gospel that, ironically, highly influenced the final Christological positions mandated by the ecumenical councils at Nicea (325 CE; Christ is *homoousios* with the Father), Constantinople I (381 CE; the Holy Spirit is *homoousios* with the Father and Son), and Chalcedon (451 CE; Christ is one *hypostasis* with two *physeis* [natures]).

Thus my first approach to John will mirror what Ghazali did with respect to his biblical textual affirmation. It will be a Muslim theo-mystical interpretation of the Gospel of John, the so-called (extended) “Book of Signs”⁹⁰ (John 1:19-12:50) specifically. In other words, interpreting the Johannine Jesus in light of Sufism in which I will take the *entire* text at face value assuming it to be the *Injil* referenced in the Qur’an. Ghazali’s uniquely affirmative approach towards the New Testament, specifically John, despite the Qur’anic claim of corruption of the Christian Scriptures (either in text or exegesis), deserves to be revisited. He takes the text as it is and deals with it on a theo-christological basis. One may make the argument that Ghazali is simply humoring the biblical text in order to demonstrate that he can refute Christian theology through it. This seems to be his employed method in *Tahaafut al-Falaasifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)*,⁹¹ in

⁸⁹ This is what Clement of Alexandria called the Gospel of John as opposed to the Synoptics which he said discussed “the bodily things” of Christ (τα σωματικά). This is from Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 266. Hengel says: “According to book VI of the *Hypotyposeis* recorded by Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.14.5-7.”

⁹⁰ I am referring to John 1:19-12:50 as the (extended) “Book of Signs” due to the fact that there exists a strong opinion among biblical scholars that this large portion of text was based upon a primitive “Signs Gospel” that was expanded upon by the evangelist in order to reflect the various Christological tensions of his day. For a possible reconstruction of the Signs Gospel, see: Robert Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

⁹¹ See: Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced, and annotated by Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2000).

which Ghazali, a staunch occasionalist and rejecter of secondary causation, entertains real cause and effect for the sake of engaging in syllogistic refutations of Muslim Neo-Platonist philosophers such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 438/1037) and al-Farabi (Alpharabius, d. 339/950), after naming *Aflatun* (أفلاطون), that is, Plato, as the "source of their unbelief" (مصدر كفرهم).⁹² In other words, he refutes them through their own preferred framework. However, it seems more likely that based on what he believes the Qur'an is saying, *tahrif* for Ghazali, resides in the meanings (معاني) of the biblical text assigned by later exegetes, not in the text itself; *tahrif* is "the deviation suffered by the divine ray when it passes through the deforming prism of our imperfect humanity,"⁹³ in this case, deviation, rather misinterpretations, resulting from the divine light of the Gospel being passed through the minds of proto-orthodox authorities.

Not unlike Aquinas in the Catholic tradition, Ghazali's general scholarly method is one of synthesis (of integration), although *fully rooted* within the framework of theomystical Islamic orthodoxy. He is *polemirenic*. He is famous for his expositions reconciling Reason and Revelation ('*Aql* and *Naql*), Legalism and Mysticism, Sunni and Shi'a issues, and Semitic and Greek (Hellenic) thought. Ghazali borrows from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, *but appropriates his borrowings in the context of Sunni Islamic Orthodoxy as guided by the Qur'an and Sunnah*. Through such engagement with the Bible, Ghazali performs what Carl Ernst refers to as a "critical rewriting"⁹⁴ of the biblical text, that is, interpreting the statements of the Johannine Jesus

⁹² *ibid*, Incoherence, *al-Muqaddimah*, 4.5.

⁹³ Zebiri, *Muslim and Christians Face to Face*, 163, quoting *The Challenge of the Scriptures*, a.k.a. *Ces Ecritures qui nous questionnent: Le Bible et la Coran*, 1993, pp. 78, 84; a publication of the Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chretien (GRIC), founded in 1977.

⁹⁴ Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, 173.

through Islam's mystical prophetology, waliology, and what Treiger refers to as "mirror Christology,"⁹⁵ which may be rooted in the East-Syriac (Nestorian) mysticism of the eighth-century charismatic monk John of Dalyatha. Whereas many Muslim readers of the Bible would shrink away from attributing John 8:58 or 10:30 to Jesus Christ, dismissing these passages outright as deviant theological machinations of the author or later scribes that (apparently) lack authentic/authoritative chains of transmission (*isnad*, اسناد), I will attempt to situate these statements according to their possible *ishari* (allusive) Christological significance in light of theo-mystical Islam, thus entertaining their textual legitimacy, at the very least for argument's sake.

With respect to modern scholarship and its engagement with Scriptures, my first approach will resemble some of the conclusions reached by the Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chretien (GRIC), mentioned earlier, whose publication *Ces Ecritures qui nous questionnent: Le Bible et le Coran (The Challenge of the Scriptures)* attempted to harmonize the Bible with the Qur'an by "questioning the traditional or majority opinion in several areas."⁹⁶ However, I would argue that my interpretations of John as espousing (proto)-Unitarian theology and mystical union with God fall within the scope of what Schneiders refers to as "ideal meanings" discussed later. One of the few modern scholars who tried his hand at Sufi biblical interpretation was Hasan Askari in his *Spiritual Quest: An Inter-Religious Dimension*. Although I do not agree with Askari's syncretistic proposition that the theological differences between Islam and Christianity, even with respect to the Trinity, are more due to semantic or linguistic differences, or his constant

⁹⁵ Alexander Treiger. Al-Ghazali's "Mirror Christology" and Its Possible East-Syriac Sources. *The Muslim World*, 2011, pp 698-713. doi: 10.1111/j.1478-1913.2011.01370.x.

⁹⁶ Zebiri, *Muslim and Christians Face to Face*, 163.

challenging of religious identity and blurring of the boundaries between Islam and Christianity to the point of predicting that the two religions will eventually converge, characteristic of irenicists, I do agree with many of his theo-mystical exegetical conclusions regarding his reading of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Zebiri says commenting on Askari, "Placing himself in the tradition of Sufis who have drawn inspiration from the figure of Jesus through the Qur'an, Askari sees the teaching of the Sermon as incorporating a 'mystical system,' the elements of which include the mystical goal, the mystical Way, the mystical state of mind, the preparation to enter the Way, and the mystical transformation."⁹⁷ The mystical goal being the Beatific Vision (Lat: *visio beatifica*; Ar: *al-Ru'ya*) resulting from an undertaking of the mystical path (*tariqah*, طريقة) which begins with *catharsis* of the heart from vices (from the Greek: καθαρος): Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν Θεὸν ὄψονται ("Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" [Matt. 5:8]). Askari also sees in Matthew 7:7, the three stages of the mystical path leading to 'divinization' (*theosis*); Αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν ζητεῖτε καὶ εὕρήσετε κρούετε καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν (*Ask*, and it will be given to you; *seek*, and you will find; *knock*, and it will be opened to you). Ghazali refers to these stages as 1) disciplining (تخليّة), ornamenting (تخليّة), and divinizing (تجليّة) the lower self (نفس).

My background in biblical languages will also give me the ability to engage with John's Gospel (and the Old Testament if necessary) in its original language of *koine* Greek (Hebrew if OT) rather than rely on English, Farsi, or Arabic translations.

⁹⁷ *ibid*, 163. See: Hasan Askari, *Spiritual Quest: An Inter-religious Dimension* (Pudsey, W. Yorks: Seven Mirrors Publishing House, 1991), 93-96. Also see: Gregory A. Barker, *Jesus in the World's Faiths: Leading Thinkers from Five Religions Reflect on His Meaning* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 142-146.

Knowledge of sacred languages will enable me to theorize about possible conceptual nominal/verbal cognates between Greek and Arabic specifically. For example, the difference between the nouns *'ilm* (علم) and *ma'rifah* (معرفة) may be equivalently conceptualized as the difference between γινώσκω and οἶδα, the former denoting general knowledge of things and concepts while the latter denoting a knowledge that is based on insightful “seeing” or understanding. Or the possible linkage between ἐπιστημη and *al-'ilm al-laduni*, the most exalted type of knowledge that gives one the ability to perceive the world from the vantage point of the gods according to Platonic Socrates (ἐπὶ [prep. meaning “upon”] + ἵστημι [to stand]); a knowledge that is directly imparted by God through mystical intuition according to Sufi understanding as it was imparted to the enigmatic Khidr (Q 18:65). This is important because it yields greater insight into the recorded statements of Jesus in John, and also produces a sharper translation in Arabic thus facilitating understanding for the Muslim reader who wishes to understand John’s Gospel in a manner that emphasizes intertextuality. For example, when Jesus tells his opposing “Jewish” interlocutors: καὶ οὐκ ἐγνώκατε αὐτόν ἐγὼ δὲ οἶδα αὐτόν, (John 8:55.1) he uses the verbs γινώσκω and οἶδα respectively. While there certainly appear to be instances where the evangelist uses these terms interchangeably, as Brown contends,⁹⁸ their juxtaposition in this specific verse suggests a distinction in their meanings. I would argue that Jesus is saying something here to the effect of: “You don’t even have basic knowledge of God, while I know Him intimately;” or “You don’t have basic *'ilm*, while I have *ma'rifah*,” thus echoing the concluding verse of John’s Prologue (1:18) which describes Christ as one who declared (lit. “exegeted” [ἐξηγήσατο]) God in a way that

⁹⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966) 513f.

surpassed even the likes of Moses, just as Khidr did. Ahmad Ibn ‘Ajibah’s (d. 1224/1809) wonderful Lexicon of Sufi Terminology known as *The Book of Ascension* (*Mi’raj al-tashawwuf*) will be especially useful in my “Islamic” analysis of Johannine concepts and terminology.⁹⁹ For example the Johannine κοιλία used in only two verses (John 3:4; 7:38) I have translated as “innermost being” in the latter (clearly not a womb as in John 3:4),¹⁰⁰ and is subtly distinct from both psyche (*nafs*) and pneuma (*ruh*); it is more nearly *al-sirr* (السر) as defined by Ibn ‘Ajibah.¹⁰¹

Just as Ghazali was quite integrative as an exegete and theologian, I will also draw upon the insights of non-Muslim historians, linguists, and exegetes of John, whether they may be described as Troeltschian, Duhemian, secular, confessional, or Trinitarian, in my theological reading of the Book of Signs as the very *Injil*. Not to do so would label me as nothing more than a dogmatician. I will be in dialogue with them throughout, sometimes in agreement and sometimes in vehement opposition. I will also, on occasion, engage the Synoptic Gospels (or even Paul) in my exegesis of John while I realize that

⁹⁹ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism* (*Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf*), translated by Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk and Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011). This Sufi Lexicon includes Ibn ‘Ajibah’s original Arabic text which I will quote at times along with Aresmouk and Fitzgerald’s beautiful translation. With respect to Arabic-English sources, I will be utilizing Hans Wehr, *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Wiesbaden, 1961 [originally]), translated by J.M. Cowan as well as the valuable *Arabic-English Lexicon* (8 vols.) (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1968) of Edward William Lane. In the latter, the author draws quite often from various classical Arabic-Arabic Lexicons such as Ibn Manzur’s *Lisan al-‘Arab* (لسان العرب), the *Qamus* (القاموس), of al-Firuzabadi, and al-Zabidi’s *Taj al-‘Arus* (تاج العروس), from the 13th, 15th, and 18th c. CE respectively. With respect to Greek-English, I will use Walter Bauer’s highly respected *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (*Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*); a translation and adaption of the fourth revised and augmented edition by W. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, 2nd edition revised by F.W. Gingrich and F. Danker (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979). I will henceforth refer to Bauer as BDAG. For beginners, I recommend *Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909). Finally for Hebrew-English, I will use the BDB: F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, coded with Strong’s Numbers (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), which is based upon H.W.F. Gesenius’ famous *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (1906).

¹⁰⁰ BDAG, 437.

¹⁰¹ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism* (*Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf*), translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 34.

this type of “inter-gospel” analysis is frowned upon by most New Testament historians - as if Matthew or Luke could explain John. However, it is imperative for me to establish an essential cohesiveness among all Gospel accounts since this method assumes that while John represents the spiritual essence of the *Injil*, Mark, Matthew, and Luke are no less *Injil*, albeit with different fulcrums. They are all inspired by God and complement each other in a way that must not escape the Muslim confessional exegete. This practice is reflective of the traditional Sunnite exegetical practice of *tafsir bi'l riwayah* in which a text of the Qur'an may be explained by related Qur'anic texts or sound Muhammadan dicta (*ahadith*), since all *ayat* and prophetic dicta constitute divine Revelation (وحي) at some level. Yet in the spirit of Ghazali and the Patristics,¹⁰² I will also at times engage in mystical exegesis (*tafsir b'il isharah*) in an effort to unlock some of the subtle shades of meaning that make the Gospel of John relevant for the Muslim reader of today. This is because theological readings of Scripture are transcendental; “[they] are interested in the conversations that texts generate in the present, and not simply in the past conversations that generated the texts.”¹⁰³

We can summarize (some of) the general conclusions of Ghazali as follows:

1. There is no unequivocal text in the Gospel of John about the divinity or godhead of Jesus although he understands how a superficial (uninitiated) reader could arrive at those conclusions. All texts essentially point to his prophethood and integral humanity. When

¹⁰² See Tertullian's *Against Marcion* 3.7; Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)* 1.8 for examples.

¹⁰³ Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 235.

studied through the lens of Ghazalian “mirror Christology,”¹⁰⁴ one comes to realize that concerning Jesus’ prophethood, there is no difference between the Qur’an and the New Testament. That is to say, when the Divine Light of the Almighty shone and *reflected* upon the pure heart of the Messiah, those who did not possess the requisite theological understanding as handed down by Moses and the Hebrew prophets (due possibly to their antinomian posture), were thus unable to discern between humanity (*nasut*) and divinity (*lahut*), and mistook the illuminated reflection for the Illuminating Source. It is as if they leaped into a still lake in an attempt to seize the moon, only to find themselves drowning in error. The “Muslim Jesus” represents what Ghazali would have called, “the just mean in belief”¹⁰⁵ (الإقتصاد في الاعتقاد); not the literal God of the Christians nor the pseudo-Messiah of the Jews.

2. Given Imam Ghazali’s (normative) view of religious texts containing both “clear” and “obscure” verses, corresponding to exoteric and esoteric dimensions known in Arabic as *thaahir* and *baatin*¹⁰⁶ or Qur’anically as *Muhkamaat* and *Mutashaabihaat* (Q:3:7), he maintains that we must utilize clear biblical texts (ὁ πατὴρ μείζων μου ἐστίν, “The Father is greater than I”) as a basis of understanding obscure texts (πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί, “Before Abraham was [born], I am [he]”) guided by the light of reason. Apparent contradictions can thus be harmonized on that basis.

¹⁰⁴ See: Alexander Treiger. Al-Ghazali’s “Mirror Christology” and Its Possible East-Syriac Sources. *The Muslim World*, 2011, pp 698-713. doi: 10.1111/j.1478-1913.2011.01370.x.

¹⁰⁵ This is Winter’s translation. Cf. Tim Winter, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6.

¹⁰⁶ “و للقران ظاهر وباطن” (“And the Qur’an has an exoteric and esoteric dimension”), *Mishkat al-Anwar*, 2.35.27

Methodology 2: The “Injil Archetype” Polemirenic Approach

Another critical approach to the New Testament adopted (or rather attempted) by most Muslim biblicists espouses that the New Testament Gospels, John for instance, may possibly contain some “reflections” of truth, but can never be considered the actual Revelation (تنزيل) that Jesus Christ received since it is inconceivable that the message of Christ and Muhammad differed on major points of theology. I say “may possibly contain” because such a Muslim cannot *completely* affirm anything in the Bible due to its status as an “abrogated” (منسوخ) and *textually*-corrupted text. Such readers cite the famous *hadith* in which ‘Umar was censured by the Prophet for reading from a Torah scroll,¹⁰⁷ or the prophetic dictum regarding the People of the Book: “Do not affirm nor deny (their narrations)” (لا تصدقوها ولا تكذبوها).¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, when the Qur’an alludes to the “Gospel” (sing.), it is not referring to the four canonical books of the New Testament (we may call these “pseudo-*injils*”) but rather to the “original” inerrant and pristine Scripture imparted to Jesus Christ, the “*Injil* Archetype,” which is apparently no longer extant.¹⁰⁹ Again, this approach is problematic unless one interprets the aforementioned Qur’anic passages (Q 3:70; 5:47) in more nuanced ways, such as proposing that the Qur’an is actually commanding the Christians to believe and follow the *Qur’an* (not the Gospel), since it claims to confirm the essential truths of the *Injil*. Classical exegetes also point out that when the Qur’an describes itself as having within its pages “books made right and straight (كتب قيمة)” (Q 98:3), these books are the “Torah, *Injil*, and *Zabur*”

¹⁰⁷ *Hadith* Sunan al-Darimi, Vol I, no. 435.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Tafsir Ibn Kathir, *al-Muqaddimah*; also quoted by Usmani, *An Approach to the Sciences of the Qur’an*, 364.

¹⁰⁹ Perhaps this supposed “Archetype” that the Qur’an refers to as “the Gospel” (in the singular), and that Muslim biblicists maintain was written in Syriac, the language of Jesus, is actually Tatian’s Diatessaron! - a text that remained extremely important for the various Middle Eastern churches of Late-Antiquity. See chapter seven of the present work.

whose essential aspects have been affirmed in the Qur'an.

It is further claimed that the pseudo-*injils* are four subjective and anonymous accounts of Jesus written decades later and in the wrong language no less; “they are worse than weak hadith,” as a prominent Muslim Shaykh once said, and the “evangelists make Jesus say whatever suits their own personal outlook” according to Bucaille.¹¹⁰ For Al-Faruqi, corruption, or “transvaluation,” of Christ’s original message began with Paul whose ideas came to influence the pseudo-*injils*.¹¹¹ Therefore John is a forgery, influenced by and replete with Platonism, Hellenistic Pagan motifs, “unchristian accretions,” and dogmatic Pauline obfuscations from Prologue to Epilogue. Bottom line: Abandon the New Testament Gospels altogether, unless one intends on deconstructing them to expose Christianity as a false religion, (which apparently, ‘Umar was not intending), such as pointing out that the Matthean Jesus was in fact a Muslim due to his *halakic/shariah* compliance. Based on the opinions of scholars such as Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1064), Ibn Ishaq (d. 151/768), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), Ibn Kathir (d. 775/1373), and others, one of the true reflections of the *Injil* Archetype in the New Testament that I alluded to earlier, for these readers, is the Johannine tradition of the Paraclete (παράκλητος) found in chapters 14-16, thus authenticating this one aspect of John’s Gospel, despite, that is, the massive “Pagan motifs” found elsewhere. This is an interesting approach; an approach that attempts to integrate theology with some sort of higher biblical criticism, yet most of these biblicists, I would wager, have not critically engaged with the so-called “Fourth Gospel” in any near substantial way - its authorship,

¹¹⁰ Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'an, and Science: The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1978), 66.

¹¹¹ Al-Faruqi, *On Arabism: 'Urubah and Religion*, 69.

principal themes, theological aims, historical development, or source/redaction/textual criticisms, such as the proposition that it seems as if the “sectarian” Johannine author envisions *himself* as having been empowered by the Paraclete in order to create what Clement of Alexandria called a εὐαγγέλιον πνευματικόν (spiritual gospel) that fully portrays Jesus’ glory (δοξα), as opposed to the Synoptics who discussed “the bodily things” of Christ (τα σωματικά),¹¹² thus explaining away his “substantial” differences with the Synoptics through an implicit assertion of divine inspiration. This is (apparently) a vastly different impetus than the Lukan ἔδοξεν καὶ μοι (“it seemed good also to me” [Luke 1:3]). John is actually claiming to be inspired by the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit (Ar. *Ruh al-Quddus*; Heb. *Ruach Qadosh*), who or whatever the Holy Spirit is. Thus according to this insight, the very “Pagan” motifs of the Gospel of John identified by these Muslim readers, such as the Isis-echoing¹¹³ “I am statements” or the Mithraic allusions in John 6, were in fact inspired by the Paraclete, the very person these Muslim biblicists call Muhammad!

I will never forget the argument of a young Muslim apologist/polemicist, inspired by the likes of Ahmed Deedat, against his Christian interlocutor one evening at a Farmer’s Market in San Luis Obispo, California. He denounced Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as thoroughly saturated in Paganism, and cited one example, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ! Unfortunately, his overzealousness to condemn the New Testament seemed to have caused him to forget what his own Scripture said about the event in question: “(Mary) said: O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?” (Q

¹¹² See note eighty-three.

¹¹³ By Isis I mean the mother of Horus and wife of Osiris. Horus also makes similar “I am claims” in *The Ritual: The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, c. 78 CE.

3:47.1). Perhaps he had resorted to denial like Azhar before him who claimed: “the Qur’an has nowhere positively affirmed that ‘Isa was born of Maryam without a human father.”¹¹⁴ Although the idea of a virgin or miraculous birth certainly predates the Christian era, in fact Harpur contends that “the Gospel ‘life’ of Jesus had already been described, in substance, at least three thousand years before he came,”¹¹⁵ I would contend that from the standpoint of “Revelation as an assimilation and critical rewriting of antecedent beliefs,” the author (Matthew or Luke) was not influenced by Paganism to write a fiction about Jesus, but rather it was God who actually manifested this miracle in order to act as a bridge to belief in Christ as a “divine,” or “divinized” being. This is seen again in Matthew’s passion narrative which reminds the reader of ancient Roman heroes such as Romulus, whose death, according to Cassius Dio’s (d. 230 CE) version, was accompanied by an eclipse and a sudden storm. In this sense, the New Testament Gospels are no more “Pagan” than the Qur’an, which affirms certain pre-Islamic beliefs such as the prohibition against fighting during the sacred months and fasting on the tenth of Muharram (*Yawm ‘Ashurah*), although the latter is established by the prophetic dicta. One could also make the argument that the Qur’an’s highly poetic style acted a “bridge to belief” for the Pagan Arabs who highly regarded beautiful speech in men and reveled in the poet’s craft. However, in terms of its content, Ernst says, “Qur’anic passages have more in common with Christian hymns or biblical psalms than with pre-Islamic Arabic poetry.”¹¹⁶

Many Muslim readers, however, who wish to retain belief in an *Injil* Archetype

¹¹⁴ A. Azhar, *Christianity in History* (Lahore: Shaykh Muhammad Ashraf, 1991), 48.

¹¹⁵ Harpur, *The Pagan Christ: Is Blind Faith Killing Christianity?*, 80.

¹¹⁶ Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an*, 45.

yet desire to be more academically, or *polemirenically* inclined toward John, often find themselves eventually dissuaded from the “Pagan argument” and engaging in some low level textual criticism. For many of these readers, deployment of the arguments of the likes of Ehrman and Metzger constitute the final nail in the Bible’s, even more, Christianity’s coffin. Ansari says: “Once... textual criticism of the Bible is accepted, the whole case for Christianity collapses automatically.”¹¹⁷ While the renouncement of hardcore polemics is certainly a step in the right direction, two points of criticism come to mind here: 1) These intellectuals, due to their lack of academic sophistication with respect to their own theology, do not imitate the great Muslim comparative theologians of the past who employed Aristotelian logic, philosophy, and syntactical exegesis in their engagements with and criticisms of Christianity, and wonder how contemporary Christians can still consider themselves monotheists while confessing Christ to be the uncreated and pre-eternal Word of God, unaware that classical Islamic theology espouses the *same* position about the archetypal Qur’an, in the face of the Mu’tazilite indictment of multiple hypostatic eternals. 2) While they enthusiastically embrace the biblical textual assessments of the agnostic Ehrman or his mentor Metzger, they would probably never apply such critical tools to the Qur’an, which they accept as an inerrant text *a priori*. In most cases, these intellectuals haven’t even *heard* of the pre-Uthmanic codices of Ubay b. Ka’b and Ibn Mas’ud or the discovery of the Yemeni palimpsest in 1972 by Puin, let alone the assessments of them by modern-day traditional *‘ulema* or Western Islamicists such as Bergstraesser, Pretzl, Jeffery, or Burton. While it is true that the text of the Qur’an has been more stable than that of the New Testament, if these biblicists actually

¹¹⁷ M. Ansari, *Islam and Christianity in the Modern World*, 4th ed. (Karachi: World Federation of Islamic Mission, 1965), 141.

believe that the acceptance of biblical textual criticism deals the death blow to Christianity, what would they say about Ibn Mas'ud's *mushaf* differing from the 'Uthmani Codex (Codices) in one hundred and one places, *in Surah 2 alone*? There must be sophistication in how one may approach these issues. Quick exaggerated generalizations will not do. Since the *Injil* Archetype theory remains the most prevalent among contemporary Muslim scholars to account for the differences between the New Testament and the Qur'an, I plan on revisiting this theory and assessing its significance in light of textual criticism of the Qur'an.

Thus my second approach to John will engage the historical critical method motivated by a theo-mystical interpretation of the Johannine Jesus. Rather than taking the text at face value initially, which we may call the "Ghazalian" method, I will engage the text of John's Book of Signs critically, historically, literarily, that is to say, from a *non-explicitly* theological/confessional perspective in order to establish the best text possible as well as identify the author's likely dialogically-motivated changes to his source material/oral traditions in the face of prevalent Christological "heresies" at the end of the first century. This interdisciplinary approach is a synthesis of historical criticism of the Gospel of John, which as I mentioned earlier, is never devoid of subjectivity and theological implications, and a Sufi biblical hermeneutic of John, which is obviously suffused in theology. Repko refers to this as "integration as comprehensive perspective."¹¹⁸ The critical difference between this method and the textual-affirmative theological approach is that this method assumes the once existence of some (now non-extant) "true *Injil*," the actual Revelation of God spoken to Jesus Christ now lost to

¹¹⁸ Allen F. Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008), 127.

posterity but subjectively reflected in some manner in John's so-called "Gospel." Hope for the discovery of the Archetype is maintained in light of modern-day archaeological findings such as the Nag Hammadi Library in 1945, or perhaps Q, the so-called "Sayings Gospel" is the Archetype yet to be found? The latter is the opinion of contemporary Muslim biblicist M.M. al-Azami,¹¹⁹ whom I will appraise along with the popular Jerald F. Dirks in Chapter Seven of the present work, *Deo volente*. Nonetheless, this method attempts to separate the "wheat from the chaff" as it were, by using the tools of modern biblical criticism to recover the "original" teachings of Jesus Christ, which were apparently adapted by the Johannine community and constructed to meet their socio-theological needs. Interestingly, this method is analogous to the hermeneutical approach of the famous yet controversial Muslim exegete and legal theorist Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) in his *al-Radd al-Sahih*, in which the author, known for his deconstructionism, appeals to variant readings in biblical manuscripts as evidence of textual corruption. Corruption (*tahrif*) here includes not only the adulteration of meanings (*ma'an*) due to the erroneous exegetical interpretations of the patristic theologians, as in the textual-affirmative approach, but also textual and transmissional tampering perpetrated by both the Johannine community as well as subsequent proto-orthodox scribes motivated by theological rivalries.

With respect to textual criticism of the New Testament, I will utilize the works of eminent textual critics such as Metzger (*A Textual Commentary to the New Testament*), Ehrman (*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*), Clivaz, Comfort, Hurtado, Parker, and Racine as well as the criteria used in choosing among conflicting (variant) readings in

¹¹⁹ See: M.M. Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 289.

New Testament witnesses such as Internal vs. External evidence, extrinsic vs. intrinsic probabilities, characteristics of various textual types (Alexandrian, Byzantine, Western, and Caesarean), as well as the generally accepted axioms of Westcott and Hort such as *lectio difficilior probabilior* (the more difficult reading is more probable) and *lectior breviar est lectio potior* (the shorter reading is the preferred one).¹²⁰ This is important because in order for me to suitably analyze a Johannine text through an Islamic lens, a lens that claims *textual* corruption of the New Testament according to this approach, I must ensure (or at least try to ensure) that the text represents what the original (autograph) author most likely had written. According to these biblicists, it is the Qur'an itself that provides its Muslim reader with the impetus to seek evidence for such corruption, yet the vast majority of Muslim scholars have no idea how/where to find such evidence systematically and utilize it efficaciously. Therefore, I will be able to engage with the text as a textual critic and possibly provide evidence of *tahrif* even from the words of patristic figures, pre-Nicene bishops, and Pagan opponents of the nascent Christian movement such as Origen of Alexandria, Bishop Dionysius, and Celsus respectively. In other words, I will attempt to establish the best text of John possible.¹²¹ If such textual corruption is established, what are its repercussions for the Islamic conceptions of Revelation (*wahy*) and *Injil*?

¹²⁰ I worked on collating a section of the Gospel of Matthew in Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae with Codex Vaticanus as a Masters' student.

¹²¹ For example, the *pericope adulterae* of John 8:1-12 was deemed to be a later addition to the text of John's Gospel by the United Bible Society in 1971 due to: 1) its consistent absence from early and diverse manuscripts such as Codex Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, etc. [External Evidence] 2) its different style and vocabulary when compared to the rest of the Fourth Gospel [Intrinsic Probabilities] and 3) its lack of citation by the early Greek patristic theologians. Hence Jesus' iconic statement "He who is without sin among you, let him throw the first stone" (Ὁ ἀναμάρτητος ὑμῶν πρῶτος τὸν λίθον ἐπ' αὐτὴν βαλέτω), a saying that is often exploited by Christian polemicists to condemn Islamic *shari'ah*'s penal punishments, is simply not authentic, so it seems.

In addition to establishing the best text of John, I will also conduct an analysis of the Gospel with respect to its themes, sources, polemical influences, and historical development within the Johannine community by examining the works of several critical scholars including Rudolph Bultmann, Raymond Brown, C.H. Dodd, Jon Ashton, and Francis Moloney. Some of these themes and stylistic features include, for instance, “realized” eschatology (and how it relates to the Paraclete), twofold meanings, misunderstandings, irony, and poetic format including the use of chiasmus, or ring structure. I intend to describe the source of John’s narrative framework, the Book of Signs, and explain how the sectarian evangelist interprets these miracles by analyzing his likely additions/embellishments to the original narrative due to polemical considerations indicative of the christological quarrels of his own time (probably around 100 CE). For example, the evangelist will quite often follow up each sign with lengthy mono/dialogues inserted into the mouth of Christ (and his opponents) that almost always conclude with either a misunderstanding by “the Jews” (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι), an apparent anachronism since *all* were Jews in Jesus’ day and the “otherness” of the “Christians” was not distinctive until at least 80-85 CE during mass synagogue expulsions, or a dispute and/or condemnation of Jewish/Judaically-oriented (Torah abiding) “believers” (πεπιστευκότας [John 8:31]) in Christ as “children of the devil” (ὁμεῖς ἐκ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου [8:44]) who apparently do not share the sky-scraping Christology of the author’s community. This may be a reference to the same Jamsonian School of Christianity that Paul accuses of adhering to “another gospel” (ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον), if one were to accept the “Paul vs. James” paradigm; Aslan certainly does.¹²² Interestingly, Pagels seems to indicate that John’s

¹²² Jude, who identifies himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος ἀδελφὸς δὲ Ἰακώβου) (Jude 1:1.1-.5), ardently commands the faithful to cling to the original message of

Gospel may have been written in response to Thomas' "gnostic" Gospel in which the author quotes Jesus emphasizing the centrality of James (*Ya'aqov Ha Tsaddiq*) after the former's departure (λογιον 12); all must go to James the Just, "for whose sake heaven and earth came into being." Therefore, the disciple Thomas is unsympathetically presented in John as a somatically-oriented doubter who "disbelieved" (ἄπιστος) and needed to *see* (physically) in order to "believe" (πιστός) but when he did see, even he could not doubt any longer that Jesus was his "Lord" and his "God" (John 20:28).

I will also analyze the text of John as a critical historian such as Bart Ehrman,¹²³ Dale Martin, or the Jesus Seminar by employing the four criteria of modern historiography known as 1) Multiple Attestation 2) Dissimilarity 3) Social Coherence (Context) and 4) The Earlier the Better, and respond to the conclusions. This will require me to occasionally dip into the Synoptic tradition especially with regards to the establishment of multiple attestations. The Johannine "I am" statements, for instance, usually taken to be claims of divinity by most Christians are: 1) Only found in John (not multiply attested); 2) Do not "cut against the grain" of what early Hellenistic Christians would have wanted to say about Jesus, namely, that he was divine in some way (not dissimilar); 3) Do not (apparently) accord with the context of the radically and uncompromisingly rigid monotheism of first century Palestine (socially incoherent); and 4) Were (supposedly) written around 100 CE, some seventy years after their apparent utterances by Jesus Christ (not early). Thus *historically* speaking, the "I am" statements appear to be exceedingly unreliable, but *theologically* for Christians, they are valuable

Jesus in the face of "ungodly" (ἄσεβεις) men who have wormed their way into the fold, yet teach corrupt doctrines (See: Jude 1:3-4).

¹²³ Bart D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Really Know About Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 122-130.

beyond measure. But if we were to apply these measures to the biblical/textual Jesus, what kind of prophet and Messiah would emerge?... the Qur'anic Jesus? What if we applied these measures to the Qur'an?

Revelation as Vox and Verba

Sunnite Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the final and "inerrant" Revelation of God. Most laity don't know, however, that the Qur'an as referring to its *codex* (مصحف) or its *recitation* (قراءة) can only be called the "Word of God" in a figurative (مجازي) sense. Allah does not speak Arabic, nor does He have physical lips and a tongue by which to "speak" in the anthropic sense. As Clement once wrote, no language can adequately describe God¹²⁴ as Godself. According to classical Islamic theology, *Kalam* (Speech) is a pre-eternal attribute (صفة) of God that is neither His Essence (*That*) nor anything other than His Essence; yet *Kalam* has no reality when divorced from the Essence, just as "Omnipotence" is meaningless detached from God. Thus the "Word" of God has two aspects: 1) *Kalam nafsi wa al-qadim* (The pre-eternal personal speech of God) which is transcendent of sound, language, and conceivable modes of articulation; that is to say, it is *a modal* (بلا كيف) and infinite in meaning. 2) *Kalam lafthiy* (The articulated speech) - the Qur'an; God's "translation" of some of the meanings (*ma'an*) of the pre-eternal Archetype into the Arabic language, brought piecemeal (*tanzil*) over twenty-three years to the Prophet Muhammad through "interior perception" and what Watt calls "interior and exterior locutions,"¹²⁵ and what over 1.5 billion Muslims today recite as the "word of God." In this way, the Arabic codex ("word" with a small "w") reflects His *Kalam*

¹²⁴ *Strom.* 5.12

¹²⁵ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford, 1960), 54-55.

(“Word” with a capital “w”). Classical theologians refer to this doctrine as Indication (الدلالة). They say, “What is found in the codex indicates upon the personal and pre-eternal Speech of God” (*Al-mawjudu fi al-mushaf dalla ‘ala Kalam Allah, al-nafsi wa al-qadim*, (الموجود في المصحف دل على كلام الله النفسي والقديم). To put things in orthodox Christian terms, the New Testament as the *word* (λόγος, John 4:41) of God, is an exposition of the apostles’ experiences with/of Jesus Christ, the *Word* (Λόγος, John 1:1) of God.

Many Muslims also assume that the *Injil* was revealed in much of the same fashion; they imagine a revelation in Syriac that must have mirrored the literary genres, asynchronicity, and even contents of the Qur’an. This I am calling the *Injil* Archetype. However, Muslims are fully cognizant of the fact that the Torah was revealed to Moses on Sinai in forty nights (Q 2:51; 7:142), as opposed to several years, and that God spoke directly to him in unique way (Q 4:164.9), which some Ash’arite theologians describe as Moses’ ability to comprehend the actual *Kalam nafsi wa al-qadim*.¹²⁶ Thus “Revelation” is not a static enterprise. With respect to the New Testament Gospels, I intend to problematize the oft-repeated Muslim insistence that the *Injil* was revealed in (the now dead) Syriac to Jesus Christ, given the fact that the oldest surviving manuscripts of the four canonical Gospels were written in majuscule (uncial) *scriptura continua* koine Greek. The oldest extant manuscript of the Gospel of John (of the New Testament in fact) dated around 125 CE, for instance, catalogued as John Ryland’s P52 (papyrus no. 52), found in a garbage heap in Upper Egypt, is the size of a credit card, and is written front (*recto*) and

¹²⁶ Due to Moses' unique discourse with God, Maimonides articulates in Principle no. seven of his Thirteen Principles of Faith (*theloshah 'ashar 'Iqqarey Emunah*): “I believe with complete faith that the prophethood of our liegelord Moses, upon whom be peace, was true, and that he is the master of the prophets” (אני מאמין (באמונה שלמה שנבואת משה רבנו עליו השלום היתה אמיתית ושהוא היה אב לנביאים); cf. *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Tractate Sanhedrin chap. 10.

back (*verso*) in koine Greek. Bodmer Papyri 66 and 75 (dated around 125-225 CE), containing all of John's Book of Signs, are also in Greek. The New Testament's first author, a Benjaminitic Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus, also wrote in Greek starting around 52 CE. Given the immense importance of Greek at that time such as its status as the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire in the ancient Near East, and the fact that the evangelists pay such homage to the Septuagint (LXX), perhaps it is time to entertain the possibility that the *Injil* was in fact revealed in Greek to Jesus who commissioned a group of disciples to remember his sayings, and that these sayings were eventually written down by these disciples, such as John, who placed them into contexts while inspired by the Holy Spirit (Paraclete). In fact, the Qur'an does not refer to the Gospel by a Semitic term such as the Arabic *Bushra*, meaning literally "Good News," and related etymologically to the Hebrew *Bissar* (בשר), but rather uses the term *Injil* (انجيل), derived from the Greek εὐαγγέλιον, with the double gamma pronounced as "ng," corresponding to the Arabic *nun* and *jeem*. The Gospel of John's diachronicity and narrative style is thus explained as being divinely-tailored for an initial audience that was accustomed and responsive to epic stories of heroes such as Homer's *Iliad*¹²⁷ or Plutarch's *Life of Romulus*. In the same way, the Qur'an's asynchronicity, lack of narrative details, and poetic style that is neither conventional poetry (شعر), nor straight (مرسل) or rhymed prose (سجع), was providentially tailored by God to appeal to *its* initial audience, the Arab. This is not to say that the Qur'an and Gospel of John do not contain universal aspects, or an "extra-textual reality,"¹²⁸ it is only to say that their initial audiences and listeners, those charged with

¹²⁷ See: Dennis MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (Yale University Press, 2000) where the author argues that Mark styled Jesus around the Greek heroes of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

¹²⁸ Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Raising of Lazarus in John 11: A Theological Reading" in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 235.

disseminating the message, were addressed by God in special terms.

Thus, according to the textual-affirming approach, when I speak of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I am not referring to some now lost Gospel Archetype written in Syriac and in the style of the Qur'an. I am referring to the *message* (Ar. *risalah*; Gr. *kerygma*) of Christ, his actual teaching about God, his role as Christ, and the purpose of Law (Torah), that has been accurately preserved in the four canonical Gospels which the Qur'an authenticates and calls "the *Injil*." The Revelation that Jesus received was not a word-for-word dictate from Heaven, as traditionalist Islam and Orthodox Judaism¹²⁹ view the Qur'an and Torah (*Khumash*) respectively as God's *ipsissima verba*. It was divine inspiration placed into the heart and mind of Christ which he expounded upon using his own words, albeit, divinely-directed, and subsequently placed into narrative form by his apostles; it is the *ipsissima vox* of God. This is rather analogous to Judaism's view of the Prophets (*Nebbim*) and Writings (*Kettubim*), the second and third sections of the tripartite *Tanakh*, whose authors, according to Jacobs, received their inspiration from *nevu'ah* (prophecy) and the *Ruach Qadosh* (Holy Spirit) respectively.¹³⁰ The *Nebbim* and *Kettubim* can further be compared to the normative Muslim view of *hadith* and *ilham*, the former representing (primarily) the utterances of Muhammad and the latter denoting the divinely-inspired speech of a saint (ولي), poet (شاعر), or "lover of God and His Messenger" whom God "has strengthened with a spirit (روح) from Him" (Q 58:22.5).¹³¹

¹²⁹ Cf. Maimonides, *Commentary of the Mishnah*, Sanhedrin X, I; Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (Springfield: Behrman House, Inc., 1973) 199-210; Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith*, 216-301.

¹³⁰ Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 199.

¹³¹ Hardy says: "Ghazali defines divine discourse (*kalam*) as 'either something a prophet hears from an angel or an angel from God or a prophet from God or a saint (*wali*) from an angel or the Muslim community from the Prophet.'" Cf. Paul A. Hardy, "Epistemology and Divine Discourse" in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 289 citing Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *al-Mustasfa min 'ilm al-usul*, ed. Ibrahim Muhammad Ramadan (Beirut, 1414/1994), I, p. 674. Also see: Yahya Michot, "Revelation" in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter,

And just as the Prophet Muhammad praised the poet Hassan b. Thabit by saying, “Verily God helps Hassan with the Holy Spirit,”¹³² the Qur’an declares in several places that Jesus was “helped by the Holy Spirit” (Q 2:87; 2:253; 5:110). The latter, in my view, is a reference to the divine inspiration received by the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, through the *Ruach Qadosh*, God’s Spirit of inspiration, “helping” Jesus in the sense of preserving his words, or at least the essence of his teaching, and probably not a reference to “Gabriel” (*Jibril*) as most commentators, including Suyuti, contend. The latter opinion would seem to render Hassan a prophet which is unacceptable according to traditional prophetology in light of Q 33:40. Interestingly, the *only* occurrence of the verb *owha*,’ meaning to reveal or inspire, in the first-person *singular* (*owhaytu*, وحييت) in the Qur’an is used in reference to the disciples of Jesus: “And *I revealed* to the disciples...” (Q 5:111.1). All other forms of this verb are either in the third person or the plural, suggesting that God is *stressing* that the words of the New Testament Gospels are true.

In fact, Al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1273) mentions several opinions regarding the Qur’anic phrase *Ruh al-Qudus*, and at one point equates it with the “*Injil*” itself, thus identifying it as Jesus’ Revelation. He supports this position by quoting Q 42:52 in which the phrase “a spirit by our command” (روحا من امرنا) is clearly a reference to the Revelation (*wahy*) of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus we may think of the Gospel of John as being an accurate recording of the teachings of Christ which he spoke through prophecy (*nevu’ah*) by an author who was guided by God’s inspiring spirit (*Ruh*) - *hadith*

ed., 180-196. Michot says: “Important forms of communication in which God speaks to humans do thus still exist after the ‘sealing’ of prophethood. Although scholars prefer to analyze them in terms of inspiration (*ilham*) rather than of revelation (*wahy*), they can sometimes be of a relatively prophetic nature” (193-194).

¹³² “*Innallaha yu’ayyidu Hassan bi Ruh’il Qudus.*” Arabic text is from: Imam Abu ‘Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Shamaail Tirmidhi*, translated by Muhammad b. ‘Aburrahman Ebrahim (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2000), 228; translation of Arabic is mine.

and *ilham* respectively. The Johannine Jesus promised his disciples that this *Ruh* (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον), or Paraclete, would soon be sent by the Father in his name (for his sake) to “teach you all things” (ὁμᾶς διδάξει πάντα) by “reminding you of all things which I have said to you” (ὁμᾶς διδάξει πάντα καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὁμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν [John 14:25]). Another opinion mentioned by al-Qurtubi is that the *Ruh al-Qudus* is Jesus himself! Jesus is the “Spirit of *al-Qudus* (God):” a figurative honorific title known grammatically as (the genitive of exaltation, اضافة التشريف) demonstrating the intimate relationship between God and His Christ as well as indicating the fact that Jesus’ spiritual (*ruhaniy*) teaching “gave life to dead hearts,”¹³³ causing them to be “born” (γεννάω) again from “above” (ἄνωθεν, [John 3:3]), as it were. God and Christ are “one” (ἐν) in heart and will, not in essence nor person; while God (“the *Abb*”),¹³⁴ being “greater than all,” (μεῖζων πάντων) gave life to all initially, Christ, being a perfected *human* reflection of his Lord, “gives” his followers “eternal life” (ζωὴν αἰώνιον) by presenting the Gospel; he is the *via ad Deum*. In my mind, Jesus’ Qur’anic title of “Spirit of God” is similar to the significance of his title “Son of God” in the Gospel of John. To use Buberian language, the Father and the Son, that is to say, the *Rabb* and *Ruh* enjoy an “*Ich und Du*” relationship,¹³⁵ and Jesus prays that the disciples might also attain such unitive actualization: “that they may also be one in us” (ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ᾧσιν [John 17:21.5]).

¹³³ Maulana Muhammad Shafi, *Ma’ariful Qur’an*, vol. 2, translated by Muhammad Ishrat Husain (Karachi: Maktaba-e-Darul ‘Uloom, 2008), 233.

¹³⁴ *Abb*: Arabic for “Father;” *Abba* in Syriac. This is a Hebraism that denotes God’s immanence to Man as in the prayer of Isaiah 64:8: “You are the Lord, our Father...” (יְהוָה אֱבִינוּ אֱתָהּ).

¹³⁵ Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Mansfield Centre: Martino, 2010).

Schneiders' Ideal Meaning as Constituting Normativity

Sandra Schneiders distinguishes four Jesus' in *The Revelatory Text*.¹³⁶ 1) The Actual Jesus, "the ontic person," who lived 2,000 years ago in Galilee of Palestine and who no longer exists; 2) The Historical Jesus who is the "literary construction" of scholars of the historical critical method (HCM) such as Schweitzer, Powell, Borg, Crossan, Wright, Sanders, *et al.*, who "all make Jesus in their own image;"¹³⁷ 3) The Proclaimed Jesus who is the object of Christian faith and piety; a Jesus who is constantly "under construction;" 4) The Textual Jesus: "the normative proclaimed Jesus enshrined in the New Testament." In other words, the proclaimed Jesus of the first-century. Schneiders contends that the proclaimed Jesus of *any* age must be measured against this norm. Thus while the contents of the biblical text frame the parameters for acceptable interpretations of the New Testament, what Schneiders, taking cue from Ricoeur, refers to as "ideal meanings," the New Testament itself, however, cannot be described as a Revelation, "in the sense of being communicated directly by God to the author." Such an idea, according to her, "espoused explicitly by fundamentalists and naively by mainline literalists, exposes the faith of Christians in the revelatory character of their foundational literature to the dismissal (if not ridicule) of sophisticated readers who know that no book, Bible, Koran, or Bhagavad Gita, can sustain such claims."¹³⁸ She rather thinks of the biblical text as being a "privileged place of encounter between the believer and God,"¹³⁹ a tabernacle (σκηνή, Heb. *mishkan*), as it were, where man may have a *revelatory* experience while in conversation with the Divine. Thus biblical interpretation will be "the

¹³⁶ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, xxi-xxx.

¹³⁷ *ibid*, xxiv.

¹³⁸ *ibid*, xviii.

¹³⁹ *ibid*, xiv.

same” but not “identical,” because no two interpreters are identical. For Schneiders then, and similar to Gadamer, “Christian imagination” plays an indispensable role in “our encounter with and understanding of the text.”¹⁴⁰ All of us bring our “social locations” (Bultmann) or what Gadamer called, our vital “forestructure,” to bear upon the text, and in this way, we create new meanings by “fusing our horizons” - a hermeneutic of transformation.

With respect to the Qur’an, perhaps Schneiders is under a slight misapprehension. When normative Muslim scholars refer to the Qur’an as a “revealed” text or “Revelation” from God, it very seldom equates to interpretive literalism or to some exegetical claim of absolute authority over the exact meaning/intent of the text/author. And while I agree with her that the presence of a normative understanding of the text, the Qur’an in this case, does not preclude personal revelatory experiences, I disagree with her assumption that “Revelation” excludes this understanding. The Qur’an, a text “communicated directly by God to the ‘author,’” *itself* allows for that privileged meeting to take place between God and the reader, because this is the very nature of Revelation. *Revelation is innately revelatory*. It was precisely ‘Umar’s revelatory experience with God mediated, or “tented,” by the Qur’anic text that dramatically transformed him from his intent to assassinate the Prophet to loving the Prophet more than his own life. Talk about a hermeneutic of transformation! When he encountered the words of God spoken in the first instance to the Prophet, “*Taha* (one of the names of Muhammad), We did not reveal this Qur’an to you to be a source of your distress” (Q 20:1-2 [because some idolaters claimed that the Qur’an overburdened the Prophet]), ‘Umar could not have known that

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, 1.

immediate context and must have felt that the text addressed him personally, “*Taha* (which also means ‘O man!’ in the Qurayshi dialect according to Ibn ‘Abbas),¹⁴¹ We did not reveal this Qur’an to you to be a source of your distress!” In this sense, the meanings of the Qur’an are infinite because no two readers are identical. This mediation of the “objective pole”¹⁴² of the Prophet’s revelatory experience establishing the text, and the “subjective pole” of ‘Umar’s experience established by his reading of the text creates transformative ideal meaning. ‘Umar’s horizon fused with that of the author and it changed his life.

According to Schneiders, the ideal meaning does not constitute the “best” or dominant meaning. It is rather an interpretation of the text that does not contradict the plain meaning of it. Thus certain hermeneutical conclusions must be ruled out. I couldn’t agree with her more. Citing the example of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) from the Lukan travel narrative, she says “there are numerous possible interpretations of this parable... (it) will undoubtedly be read differently in a poor Latin American *barrio* than in a white suburban U.S. parish.”¹⁴³ However if one should make the case that the parable is “a condemnation of Samaritanism” or that the priest and Levite are who “God really approves of since they obviously are in good standing with the Law,” then such a reader has not tapped into an ideal meaning.¹⁴⁴ In the Qur’an we read the narrative of the great world ruler known as “the Two-Horned One” (*Dhu al-Qarnayn*) in the “middle-Meccan,” to use Noldeke’s term,¹⁴⁵ *Surah* 18 (*Al-Kahf*), verses 83-102. Carl Ernst has identified

¹⁴¹ *Tanwir al-Miqbas* 20:1.

¹⁴² Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, xxxiv.

¹⁴³ *ibid*, xxxii.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*, xxiii.

¹⁴⁵ See: Emmanuelle Stefanidis, “The Qur’an Made Linear: A Study of the *Geschichte des Qorans*’ Chronological Reordering,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2008), 1-22.

this figure as Alexander the son of Philip of Macedon (d. 323 BCE) and provides sufficient evidence to back his claim, such as the narrative's "three journeys" mirroring the journeys described in the Syriac *Legend of Alexander*, and reproduces the image of an ancient Macedonian coin representing Alexander with two ram's horns, a "symbol of Zeus/Ammon."¹⁴⁶ As I mentioned some of these things one day in a Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) class that I was teaching, I noticed that many of the Muslims in the audience were visibly bothered. "Alexander the Great!?" one of them said outraged, "He was a Pagan!" Obviously my objector took strong exception to the ideal meaning proposed by the likes of Ernst. "What do the *real* 'ulema say?" he inquired. Anticipating such a question, I read from the exegesis of the celebrated classical scholar Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505) who says in his *Jalalayn*, "'They ask you concerning *Dhu al-Qarnayn* (Q 18:83.1).' And his name was Alexander, and he was not a prophet (هو لم يكن نبيا)." Alexander, despite his apparent theological devotions,¹⁴⁷ was a direct student of Aristotle, an "archetypal world leader,"¹⁴⁸ and someone who exemplified virtue and the pursuit of truth, despite Oliver Stone's film depiction. The Qur'an is inclusive; it is big-hearted even if we don't want to be. Thus given Imam al-Suyuti's exemplary knowledge of theology and what constitutes *taklif*,¹⁴⁹ his identification of *Dhu al-Qarnayn* with Alexander the Great qualifies as ideal meaning.

¹⁴⁶ Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, 150.

¹⁴⁷ Josephus mentions in his *Antiquities* that Alexander once visited Gaza and the High Priest Jaddua showed him his descriptions in the book of Daniel. See: www.jewishencyclopedia.com/article/1120-alexander-the-great.

¹⁴⁸ Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, 133.

¹⁴⁹ These four requisites of *taklif* (responsibility) are: 1) '*Aql* (sound intellect) 2) *Bulugh* (maturity) 3) *Salamat al-hawas* (sound senses [meaning either deaf or blind and not deaf and blind]) 4) *Balaghat-hu al-da'wat al-sahihah* (the potential proselyte was reached by a sound prophetic summons). People who do not meet these requisites will fall under the banner of God's amnesty and are considered "safe" (*najun*) from the Fire.

But moralizing parables and ancient narratives aside, how does a reader establish an ideal meaning in a text that deals directly with God? What if the “plain meaning” of the text is rather ambiguous? Texts that speak of God are often metaphorical, since language is by its very nature limited, while God is beyond even our comprehensions. I can understand why Clement said, “human teachers who speak about God are not reliable,”¹⁵⁰ as well as Augustine’s “apophatic maxim,”¹⁵¹ “If you comprehend it, it is not God.”¹⁵² Schneiders, referring to the expression “God is our Father,” says, “Literalized metaphor is the cancer of the religious imagination, powerfully and pathologically at work.”¹⁵³ Al-Faruqi makes an argument in his *On Arabism* that the Arab mind, accustomed to metaphor, would not have issues even with the Gospel of John, while Western literalism is to blame for literalizing “the Son of God.”¹⁵⁴ Zebiri, commenting on Al-Faruqi says, “Such a metaphorical approach to language would seem to offer the possibility of authenticating most, if not all, of the biblical text, *but Al-Faruqi does not take advantage of this*”¹⁵⁵ (emphasis mine). Al-Faruqi’s notion of “Christianist transvaluation” of the biblical *text* precludes his full acceptance of it. I do indeed plan on authenticating the entire text of John according to my first method because here transvaluation occurs only on the level of post-apostolic exegesis such as in the works of Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius, and Augustine. Thus for the Sufi, such as the Johannine Jesus, the “outward” or “apparent” (ظاهري) aspects of his inevitably inadequate articulations concerning his relationship with God, “the Father,” may *seem*

¹⁵⁰ *Strom.* 6.18.

¹⁵¹ Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 52.

¹⁵² *Sermo.* 117.5

¹⁵³ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 30.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Faruqi, *On Arabism: 'Urubah and Religion*, 85.

¹⁵⁵ Zebiri, *Muslim and Christians Face to Face*, 145.

blasphemous from the perspective of Judaism, but that is only because he is speaking metaphorically. Hence the hermeneutical peril of the Gospel of John: Due to its ambiguous nature, the meaning may be (and has been) idealized in a number of divergent ways. Boyarin says, “Christology, or the early ideas about Christ, is also a Jewish discourse and not - until much later - an anti-Jewish discourse at all... Thus the basic underlying thoughts from which both the Trinity and the Incarnation grew are there in the very world into which Jesus was born and in which he was first written about in the Gospel of Mark and John.”¹⁵⁶ Although I do not agree with the (proto-)orthodox interpretations of certain Johannine statements, I do understand how those exegetes arrived at those interpretations. Jesus as the literal Son of God (γεννηθεντα ου ποιηθεντα) became (and obviously still is) an ideal meaning precisely *because* the text of John is Sufic in nature. Sufism, however, must be understood and grounded by *Tawhid*, just as the Gospel of John, as Buzzard contends, must be balanced with the Synoptics.¹⁵⁷ And the *text* of the Gospel of John itself, I would argue according to my second method, and in agreement with Boyarin in his *The Jewish Gospels*, is totally grounded in first-century Palestinian Judaism: John’s Logos Christology reflects Judaism’s Wisdom literature (Gr. σοφία; Heb. *dabbar/hokma*; Aram. *memra*); the phrase “Son of God” written in Latin as *Filius Divi* on ancient Roman coins depicting Caesar Augustus (hence the “Emperor Cult” argument) also occurs several times in the Old Testament describing, with figurative language, pious Jews (*B’ney Elyon*, בְּנֵי עֶלְיוֹן [Psalm 82:6]); “God the Father,” also a title of the Emperor, as in *Pater patriae*, is used in Isaiah 64:16: “You are the Lord, our Father” (*Attah Adonai Avinu*, אַתָּה יְהוָה אֲבוּנוּ); Dualism, apparently Platonic, is also seen in

¹⁵⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 5-6.

¹⁵⁷ See: Anthony Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian* (Morrow: Restoration Fellowship, 2007).

Essence cosmology - the “children of light” vs. “the children of darkness;” Even the idea of a “Suffering Messiah,” thought by many to be a strictly Christian interpretation of Isaiah 53, was part and parcel of pre-Christian Jewish tradition according to Boyarin. Hengel says: “As narrated Christology the Fourth Gospel is grounded throughout in the Old Testament.”¹⁵⁸ The Gospel of John gives “Jewish” titles to Jesus as no other Gospel has: “the Anointed, Messiah, King, Rabbi, Rabbouni, Son of God and Son of Man, the Lord, the Holy One of God, the Elect, the Only-Begotten, the Prophet, the Lamb of God, the Light of the World, the True Vine, the Good Shepherd, and -not least-the absolute ἐγὼ εἰμὶ or even θεός himself.”¹⁵⁹ We will analyze these titles throughout this work, but the point of Hengel is clear: Jesus must be adequately contextualized vis-a-vis his socio-religious milieu. I would add, however, that John’s Gospel must be creedally anchored by the unequivocal John 17:3. The “corrupt” aspect of John is only on the level of post-apostolic/canonical exegesis which critically re-defined figurative Hebraisms for the Greco-Roman palate, it does not directly touch the text itself despite what many Muslim biblicists have claimed. Such Muslim readers of John have also accepted the post-apostolic Trinitarian judgments of the highly mystical Johannine statements without considering their counterparts in their own tradition. Why is it that when Al-Husayn b. al-Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 309/922) declared “I am the Truth!” (انا الحق),¹⁶⁰ they are (maybe!) willing to make excuses in light of illuminatory experience (*tasawwuf dhawqi*), mystical actualization (*tahqiq*), and theopathic utterance (*shathiya*), but when Jesus declares in

¹⁵⁸ Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 271.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ See Mayer who quotes al-Hallaj’s “I am statements,” that led to his charge of incarnationism (*hulul*): “If you do not know Him, then at least know His signs! I am that sign and I am the Truth!” Cf. Toby Mayer, “Theology and Sufism,” in *Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 266-267.

John 14:6.5, “I am... the Truth” (Εγώ εἰμι... ἡ ἀλήθεια), they suddenly deploy a hermeneutic of suspicion by claiming it a forgery foisted upon Christ by a deceptive author? Did not Muhammad also say, “Whoever sees me, has seen the Truth?”¹⁶¹ *Delimit* John 14:6 with the essential creed espoused in 17:3 just as we delimited the “hand of God” passage in the Qur’an with the *ancora theologiae* of the Qur’an, 42:11.5; “Eternal life” is “to know (γινώσκωσιν) You” (the Father, John 17:1), “*the only true God*” (τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν), and (to know) the one whom you have sent, Jesus Christ.” The name Jesus Christ (Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν) is in the accusative case, thus explaining my translation “and (to know) ...,” meaning that the verb γινώσκω also applies to Jesus. One must be annihilated in the gnosis (معرفة) of both God and Christ, which will naturally lead to *agape* (محبة) of them. This is eternal life. As the Prophet Muhammad once said about Ali, “He loves Allah and His Apostle, and is loved by Allah and His Apostle” (yuhibbu’Laha wa Rasulahu, wa yuhibbuhu’Lahu wa Rasuluhu, يحب الله ورسوله و يحب الله ورسوله). Interestingly, Augustine in his *Homilies on John* moved the phrase “the only true God” to after “Jesus Christ” and Beza, Aquinas, and Aretius followed suit, thus giving the reader the impression that the Father *and Jesus* are “the only true God”¹⁶² - “a perversion running counter to the strict monotheism of John,” according to Meyer.¹⁶³

The crucial difference, however, on the level of interpretation is that unlike early and contemporary Christianity in which exegetes consistently maintained (proto-)Unitarian beliefs such as the ontological inequality between the Father and Son in the forms of Ebionism, Dynamic Monarchism, Arianism, Homoeousianism,

¹⁶¹ من رأني فقد رأى الحق (Hadith of Bukhari).

¹⁶² Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian*, 276.

¹⁶³ ibid. Buzzard quotes Meyer from *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Funk and Wagnall, 1884), 462.

Heteroousianism, and Socinianism for instance, no Muslim reader of the Qur'an 4:80 and 9:62 has ever claimed that Muhammad is *essentially* God. Deifying the Prophet, or Christ for that matter, is not an acceptable ideal meaning of the Qur'anic text because, unlike John, there is a much stronger emphasis on God's absolute transcendence and oneness, and, as Ghazali argued, the obscure texts (*mutashabihat*) must be read in the light of these clear ones (*muhkamat*). Furthermore, as far as I know, there has never been a Muslim sectarian in all of Islamic history that claimed that the Qur'an teaches the deity of Muhammad. Thus certain Protestant authors, in their attempts to read Christ's deity¹⁶⁴ or original sin¹⁶⁵ into the Qur'anic text usually find themselves labeled as "radical revisionists" or academically questionable eisogetes, because making the Qur'an say "Jesus is God" is *not* comparable to making John say "Jesus is not God," the latter does not contravene the plain meanings of the text and has much precedent in *Christian* biblical exegetical history. In other words, the latter is an ideal meaning of the Gospel of John. In fact, Buzzard, a contemporary Socinian Christian, says, "I am not persuaded, and neither are *millions* of others, that Trinitarianism is biblical monotheism at all"¹⁶⁶ (emphasis mine). Moreover, the *fundamental* elements of *regula fidei* as espoused by the Ante-Nicene fathers do not necessarily have to clash with Islam. Ehrman says: "Typically included in the various formulations of the regula was belief in only one God, the creator of the world, who created everything out of nothing; belief in his Son, Jesus Christ, predicted by the prophets and born of the Virgin Mary; belief in his miraculous life,

¹⁶⁴ 'Abdiyah Akbar 'Abdul-Haqq makes this claim. See: A. 'Abdul-Haqq, *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1980), chapter 7.

¹⁶⁵ Yvonne and Wadi Haddad make this claim: See: Y.Y. Haddad and W.Z. Haddad, eds, *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), chapters 11 and 12.

¹⁶⁶ Buzzard, *Jesus was Not a Trinitarian*, 2.

death, resurrection, and ascension; and belief in the Holy Spirit, who is present on earth until the end, when there will be a final judgment in which the righteous will be rewarded and the unrighteous condemned to eternal torment (thus, e.g., Tertullian, *Prescription* 13).¹⁶⁷ Irenaeus stated similar things in his “Rule of Truth.”¹⁶⁸ I think we can work with this. However, it is in the theo-Christological nitty-gritty of the fathers’ commentaries where we find breaches of radical monotheism that eventually set the foundation for Nicea I and Constantinople I and ultimately, a clash with the teachings of Muhammad. For example, Ignatius refers to Jesus as “our God Jesus Christ,” “God come in the flesh,” and refers to Jesus’ blood as “the blood of God.”¹⁶⁹ He says to the Trallians: “Continue in intimate union with Jesus Christ our God.”¹⁷⁰ Hippolytus spoke of “triple manifestation”¹⁷¹ while Tertullian was the very first Latin theologian to use the word *trinitas* (Trinity).¹⁷² Justin refers to Jesus as “Lord and God”¹⁷³ and Irenaeus refers to Jesus as “very God.”¹⁷⁴ Then we get Origen’s *homoousios*¹⁷⁵ and Athanasius’ acceptance of it.¹⁷⁶ The rest is history.

With respect to the Qur’an, exegetical radicality can be seen in the work of Giulio Basetti-Sani,¹⁷⁷ an Italian Franciscan Islamicist, who after abandoning his former position regarding the Qur’an as being a satanically-inspired text, came to fully authenticate the

¹⁶⁷ Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, 194.

¹⁶⁸ *Adv. haer.* 1.22.1 (SC 264:308.1-31). Cf. D. Jeffrey Bingham “Christianizing Divine Aseity,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 59.

¹⁶⁹ *Ign. Rom.* 8:3; *Ign. Eph.* 7:2; *Ign. Eph.* 1:1.

¹⁷⁰ *Trallians* 7.

¹⁷¹ *Refutation* 8:2.

¹⁷² *Against Praxeas*, 2. See: Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, 156. Cf. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 90.

¹⁷³ *Dialogue*, 129.

¹⁷⁴ *Adv. haer.* 4.6.7.

¹⁷⁵ *Frg. Heb.* 93.

¹⁷⁶ *Decr.* 21.

¹⁷⁷ See: Giulio Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977).

text of the Qur'an by believing it to be the word of God, but only in the sense that the Qur'an was a *praeparatio evangelica*, that required a "Christian key" to be adequately understood. Thus in Basetti-Sani's proposed typological methodology, not unlike his approach to the Old Testament, the entire Qur'an points to Christ and his deity and contains several Christian "symbols" (star, fish, olive, water, etc.) that Muslims are simply not able to decipher due to their lack of Christian theological education. Interestingly, Basetti-Sani justified his position regarding the Qur'an by appealing to Ghazali's notion that the Qur'an contains both an exoteric (ظاهري) as well as an esoteric (باطني) aspect. However only Christians may access the esotericisms and interpret them accurately. Thus while Ghazali, and other mystically-inclined exegetes like Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765) and Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896) for that matter, were able to recognize the Qur'an's abstract and mystical dimension, they are precluded from dealing with them correctly due to their lack of a Christian key to unlock their mysteries. Thus full-authentication of the religious texts of others, usually indicative of the irenical approach with its desire to synthesize, is in this case a ploy for polemics. Equally radical and "Da Vinci Code-esque" are the claims of G. Luling and Luxenberg who maintain respectively that the Qur'an was originally a Christian Scripture, and that it was revealed in Syriac; the latter view, seemingly in total avoidance (or ignorance) of the Qur'an's transmissional heritage, further claims that scribes eventually and arbitrarily added the diacritical notations to the Uthmani Codices thus rendering approximately "one-quarter" of the text utterly incomprehensible.¹⁷⁸

While the revised methodology of Basetti-Sani seems a bit more congenial than

¹⁷⁸ See: Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qur'an: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Qur'an* (Prometheus, 2009).

his former position regarding the Qur'an, to suggest that Muslims cannot understand their Scripture unless a Christian were to interpret it for them, is obviously problematic for most Muslims who will (should) view such a notion as a type of "exegetical colonization." One may then ask: How is the methodology of Basetti-Sani different than my own when it comes to the Gospel of John (if we fully affirm the text of John's Gospel and consider it to be the true *Injil* referenced in the Qur'an)? First of all, I am certainly not claiming that Christians need a Muslim interpreter in order to understand their Scriptures. I am claiming, however, that the initial audience of Jesus Christ, first-century Galilean Jews, would have understood the esoterically-oriented Johannine utterances of the Nazarene preacher in ways that both simultaneously affirmed what Islam's theomystical tradition would teach a few centuries later as well as repudiated the Christological contentions of many post-apostolic patristic figures such as Irenaeus of Lyons and Clement of Alexandria who would come to define Christian theological "orthodoxy" for modern-day confessional interpreters of John such as Jeffrey Bingham, Martin Hengel, Paul Anderson, and Rowan Williams.¹⁷⁹ In this sense, my conclusions regarding John are essentially attempts to recapitulate *something* of what the earliest followers of Jesus had already known, not what Muslims would have had to teach them centuries later. Whale says: "Working with the data of the New Testament and using Greek philosophy as its instrument, [post-biblical writing] constructed the doctrine of Trinity in Unity... The popular view of the Trinity has often been a veiled Tritheism."¹⁸⁰ I am also not saying that the entire Gospel of John is essentially one big Muhammadan

¹⁷⁹ See: Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser, editors, *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).

¹⁸⁰ Quoted from: Buzzard, *Jesus was Not a Trinitarian*, 196. Cf. J.S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 112-118.

typology, or “*praeparatio Qur’an*,” although there may be subtle indications of future prophecy according to Kung.¹⁸¹ In fact, Kung describes Muhammad as a “prophetic corrective” and appeals to the Prophet’s observable “fruits,”¹⁸² while Watt, another Protestant says clearly, “I consider Muhammad was truly a prophet,”¹⁸³ although “prophet” in Watt’s mind seems to mean a religious intellectual or genius. Catholic Islamicists such as Massignon and Caspar both considered Muhammad prophetic in some way, with the latter describing Muhammad through the lens of Thomist theology as experiencing a “partial prophetic charism.”¹⁸⁴ However my methodology does somewhat parallel Basetti-Sani in at least one important aspect: applying an Islamic theo-mystical (Sufi) hermeneutic to the Gospel of John may unlock subtle shades of meaning that may cause contemporary Christians to take a second or third look at the Gospel.

¹⁸¹ Quoted from: Zebiri, *Muslim and Christians Face to Face*, 202; cf. Hans Kung, "Muhammad: A Prophet?" in *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, trans. P Heinegg (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1987), 28.

¹⁸² *ibid*, 26-27, 126.

¹⁸³ W.M. Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca: History in the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 1.

¹⁸⁴ R Caspar, *Traite de theologie musulmane*, Vol 1: *Historie de la pensee religieuse musulmane* (Rome: PISAI, 1987), 101.

Chapter Two: The Prophet's Path as *Via ad Deum* (الطريقة الى الله): Love of God and Mystical Union in Sunni Orthodoxy

Introduction

“Those who believe are stauncher in their love for Allah”¹⁸⁵ (Q 2:165.5). The ultimate goal of the Sufi even beyond falling in love with God is to actualize God's love for him. The keepers of sacred knowledge (العلماء) in an attempt to answer the laity's oft-repeated question: “How do we know that God loves us?” exhort their students to measure themselves by their prayers. In Λογιον 68 of his *Taj al- 'Arus* (*The Bridegroom's Crown*), Ibn 'Ata Allah al-Sankandari (d. 709/1309) quoting Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 656/1258) says, “Can you imagine a lover who does not wish to meet his beloved? Thus whoever wants to know the reality of their relationship with God, and wants to examine their state with God, let him look at his prayer.”¹⁸⁶ Scholars will also urge their students to seek out the people of God (اهل الله), the spiritual masters and physicians of the hearts (اطباء القلوب) who have attained the degree of “perpetuity after

¹⁸⁵ والذين أشد حبا لله; I will continue to transliterate the Name of God in Arabic as “Allah” in English and not as “*al-Lah*,” as many scholars have and continue to do, for I do not believe that the *alif* and *lam* at the beginning of the word represent the definite article. Allah is the archaic Semitic Name of God used by most biblical and qur'anic prophets, and related etymologically to the Hebrew אלהים. This is “the most correct of opinions” according to Lane (82), and he mentions that al-Zabidi asserted that using the vocative particle (يا) before “Allah” would not be correct if the *alim-lam* were the article (Lane, 82, cf. *Taj al-'Arus*), as in the statment “Ya Allah!” (يا الله). Sibawayh does however give a possible root of *laa-ha* (لا), meaning “to glimmer or shine” (Lane, 83), while al-Zabidi also mentions *a-li-ha* (أله) as a possibility as well (Lane, 83), meaning “to go to and fro in fear and perplexity.” The latter is supported by the BDB (أله [Strong's no. 410, p. 41]). Gesenius gives an alternate root of *aleph-waw-lamed* (أول), meaning “strength and power” (pg. 20), related to the Arabic Form II *awwala* (أول), “to interpret” or “find the origin of.”

¹⁸⁶ Λογιον 68. Quoted from: Sherman Jackson, *Sufism for Non-Sufis? Ibn 'Ata Allah al-Sakandari's Taj al-'Arus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65-66.

annihilation” (البقاء بعد الفناء) and whose hearts have been illuminated by the truth of certainty (حق اليقين),¹⁸⁷ and ask them frankly what they think of them. If God’s people should think well of the students, then they should be of good cheer; this is a reliable indication (اشارة) that their Lord thinks well of them as well. When the heart and mind of a saint (ولي) is drowned in the love and contemplation of his Lord, no personal ego can possibly respond, only divinely-directed speech.

The Sufis are quick to point out that while it is undoubtedly important for us to love God, in fact it is mandatory, it is much more important for God to love us. But would God love someone who doesn’t love Him? Theologians affirm that from the transchronic vista of God’s “glance” (نظرة) into the hearts of men, their ends (خواتيم) are more than apparent to Him. Malikite jurist and Ash’arite theologian Al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1273) suggests that when ‘Umar (d. 23/644) was prostrating himself to idols in Mecca and had resolved upon the killing of God’s Beloved (حبيب الله), the Master Muhammad, ‘Umar was indeed beloved to God! In reality Al-Qurtubi’s apparent temerity when speaking of God only comes from his cognizance that God simply knew that someday ‘Umar would await the Resurrection while buried in the selfsame soil as His Beloved. And here lies the answer next to ‘Umar according to the Sufis: The Prophet Muhammad is the path to God’s love (محبة) and as the *Ba’Alawi Sadat* of Yemen call him, “the key to the door of God’s mercy” (مفتاح باب رحمة الله), may God bless him and give him peace (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

¹⁸⁷ The Sufis elaborate upon three types of *yaqin* (certitude) named in the Qur’an: 1) the knowledge of certainty (علم اليقين): having knowledge that a thing exists; 2) the eye of certainty (عين اليقين): having witnessed that a thing exists; 3) the truth of certainty (حق اليقين): having experienced the existence of a thing. To “taste” (*dhawq*) one’s faith is to attain *haqq al-yaqin*. Cf. Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk and Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011), 23.

“Sufism (تصوف) is the management (تصرف) by the individual Muslim of his lower self (نفس) exercised by rousing it from states of heedlessness, restraining it from vices, and directing it toward virtues, in perfect compliance with the Seal of the prophets and messengers, whose innate character was the Qur’an;”¹⁸⁸ *Muhammadi actio fuit nostra instruction.*¹⁸⁹ The Qur’an says, “Say (O Muhammad): If you love God, then follow me – so that God will love you and forgive you your sins; God is Forgiving, Merciful” (Q 3:31). In stark contrast to the popular “prosperity gospel” currently being espoused by many Christian (and Muslim) preachers which seems to teach that God’s love for a person is commensurate with the size of that person’s bank account, we glean from this verse, appropriately titled *ayah al-imtihan* (the verse of examination), that in fact the barometer for the *mahabbah* (love) of God is only affected by our level of adherence (اتباع) to the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet’s character and experience provide the foundational bedrock of the Sufi path - “the ultimate reference for Sufism”¹⁹⁰ according to Winter. It is fantastically misguided to imagine that one can successfully tread this path without having secured belief in the Prophet as God’s specially chosen Emissary to humankind. It is as contradictory as one claiming to be a non-Jewish Rabbi or a non-Christian Catholic priest; there is no such thing as a non-Muslim Sufi. The Prophet is a

¹⁸⁸ Quoted from: Professor Shaikh ‘Abd al-Karim, “Forward,” in *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way* by Shaikh Amin ‘Ala ad-Din Al-Naqshbandi, translated by Dr. Muhammad Sharif Ahmad (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011), xiii. ‘Ayesha once said, كان خلفه القرآن (“His character was the Qur’an”).

¹⁸⁹ “Muhammad’s action was our instruction.” This is a play on Aquinas’ famous statement “Christ’s action was our instruction” (*Christi actio fuit nostra instructio*), an axiom which appears seventeen times in the works of Aquinas. See: Jean-Pierre Torrell O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Spiritual Master: Saint Thomas d’Aquin, Maître Spirituel vol. II*, translated by Robert Royal (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996) 118.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Ghazali, *On Disciplining the Soul and Breaking the Two Desires. Kitab Riyaday al-Nafs and Kitab Kasr al-Shahwatayn*, translated by T.J. Winter (London: Islamic Texts Society, 1997), xvii.

necessary means (سبب). *Ultimately*, “the aspirant (*al-murid*) is someone who wants nothing except his guardian Lord (من لا إرادة له دون مولاه).”¹⁹¹

To engage the spiritual path (طريقة) without affirming what the Prophet claimed about himself is to exclude from oneself true mystical illuminations, theophanies, and *charismata* (كرمات) that *should* result from the successful trekking of a believing aspirant (توفيق); it is to exclude from oneself the ineffable treasures of Providence (توفيق); and it is to expose oneself to demonic insinuations (وسوسة), self-aggrandizement (كبر), and divine beguilement (استدراج). It is the difference between what happens to the heart of the believer (مؤمن) when his tongue utters the Divine Name “*Allah, Allah, Allah*,” and when the unbeliever (كافر) happens to articulate the Name by moving his tongue toward his palate and then dropping it beneath his lower set of teeth. That is because while he is “happy with the benefaction (النعمة), he is veiled from the Benefactor (المنعم).”¹⁹² If one should claim that he is a spiritual director (مرشد) yet does not adhere to Prophetic *Sunnah*, nor accept the Prophet’s mastery (سيادة) over humankind, “his charismatic talent (*istidraj* masquerading as *karamat*) is akin to the spell-binding of Satan and the witchcraft of the Hindus or something that happens by chance.”¹⁹³

An old Arabic proverb warns people not to get trapped in disputations about technical terminology (اسطلاحات) but rather to strive to actualize meanings (معان). The very utterance of the word “Sufism” continues to cause various visceral reactions from many so-called “Salafi” Muslims. These reactions range from the usual facial contortions and head-shakings to even the occasional pronouncements of malediction (لعنة), heresy

¹⁹¹ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 17.

¹⁹² *ibid*, 24.

¹⁹³ Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 50.

(زندقة), and anathema (كفر). Some of these Muslims, claiming to be in the tradition of the “patristic” Predecessors (*al-Salaf*) thus motivated by purist and pietistic impulses, denounce Sufism as a reprehensible innovation (بدعة) that reeks of blasphemous Christian influence. According to them, all of this talk about the “archetypal Muhammadan light” (*nur Muhammadi*, نور محمدي), mystical union (جمع), intermediacy through God’s beloved ones (توسل), and beseeching of dead saints (استغاثة) must be eradicated collectively from Muslim consciousness if Muslims want to “recapture” that pristine “apostolic” creed of the Prophet’s generation. Did not the Prophet warn his followers about making him into a “Christian” Muhammad?¹⁹⁴

Another group of devotees, quite prevalent in the West, assume a clear antinomian posture with respect to the *shari’ah*, and seem to prefer to call themselves “Sufis” rather than Muslims. Authoritative and well-grounded scholars of orthodoxy refer to these devotees as pseudo-Sufis, or *Mutasawwifin* (متصوفين). It is possible that their misapprehensions concerning Sufism essentially stem from their subconscious and skewed acceptance of Protestantism’s *sola fide* doctrine rooted in Pauline dualism which imagines the spirit and the law bifurcated into black and white absolutes with the latter seen as a “fleshy” (nonspiritual) path abrogated by a transcendental realization that God only wants “relationship not religion.” Worse yet, they quite often attribute their deviant ideas to celebrated scholars, mystics, and theologians such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn al- ‘Arabi, and Rumi. The jurists are often perceived as Pharisaic formalists (*mutarassimun*, مترسمون) who are blinded by their worship of the letter and insistence upon adherence to a “lower” path. For these pseudo-Sufis, the lights and realities of *tasawwuf* do not originate in but

¹⁹⁴ لا تطروني كما أطرت النصارى عيسى ابن مريم (Do not flatter me as the Christians flattered Jesus, the son of Mary) (*Hadith* of Bukhari and Ahmad; also mentioned in *Shamma’il* Tirmidhi).

rather stand distinct from the Abrahamic tradition, antedating the great prophets and patriarchs who eventually came to know of these great independent truths and taste of their fruits only after transcending their derivative, and in many cases, divisive religions. Thus the centrality of the Prophet's Precedent (*Sunnah*, سنة) and personal theophany, which provide the spiritual aspirant a time-tested (مجرب) method of arriving at God's "doorstep," become drastically compromised.

True understandings of Islamic spirituality is demonstrated in the statements of Shaykh Muhammad Amin al-Kurdi al-Irbili (d. 1331/1913) and Shaykh Amin 'ala al-Din al-Naqshbandi who said respectively, "The sacred law (شريعة) is a tree; the spiritual path (طريقة) its branches; and reality (حقيقة) is its fruits"¹⁹⁵ - This is threefold meaning of *tasawwuf*; And "Sufism is faith in the Uniqueness of Allah, strict adherence to the sacred law of the Qur'an in belief and practice, and personal and social conduct in the radiant light of the pure Prophetic *Sunnah*."¹⁹⁶ Ibn 'Ajibah said: "The science of Sufism is the foremost of the [religious] sciences (سيد العلوم) and both the goal (لياب) and heart (أساس) of the revealed law."¹⁹⁷ He also said: "The law (الشريعة) is the responsibility required of us outwardly. The way (الطريقة) is the purification of our minds. The truth (الحقيقة) is to perceive God in His epiphanies (تجليات). The law is [there] so that you may worship Him, the way, that you may journey to Him, and the truth, that you may witness Him."¹⁹⁸ The contemporary scholar Buehler says, "In transformative terms, *Shari'ah* is medical science, *tariqa* is preventing disease and taking medicine, and *haqiqa* is eternally perfect

¹⁹⁵ Quoted from: Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer's Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 28 (citation is given as *Tanwir al-qulub*, 409).

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*, 13.

¹⁹⁷ Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa'iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 1.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*, 60.

health.”¹⁹⁹ Finally, according to Umar F. Abd-Allah, the famous jurist and Sufi Imam Sha'rani maintained that “the Sufis were beyond reproach regarding the religious law. It was, indeed, their adherence to the law that, in each case of individual enlightenment, had brought them into the presence of God.”²⁰⁰

What is Sufism?

One of the “ten foundations” (المباني العشرة)²⁰¹ of any art or science is its definition (حد), and the great scholars and mystics of the past have defined Sufism and Sufis using various words.²⁰² Junayd said, “Sufism means that the Lord of Truth makes you die to yourself and makes you live through Him.”²⁰³ Sahnun said, “(Sufism is) that you possess nothing and nothing possesses you.”²⁰⁴ Ibn ‘Ajibah said: “Sufism (*tasawwuf*) is the science of how to journey (كيفية السلوك) into the presence of the King of kings. It is to

¹⁹⁹ Arthur F. Buehler, “Sufism: A Holistic Approach to Islam” in *Sufi Illuminations: A Journal Devoted to the Study of Islam and Sufism*, Vol. 4 No. 1 Spring 2008, chief ed. Muaz Redzic (Gilbert: NFIE) , 11.

²⁰⁰ Umar F. Abd-Allah, “Theological Dimensions of Islamic Law” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 253; cf. Sha'rani, 'Abd al-Wahhab, *al-Tabqat al-kubra* (Cairo, 1965), I, p. 6.

²⁰¹ The “ten foundations” are put into rhyme by Shaykh Muhammad al-Sibani (d. 1207/1792): *Inna mabadi kulli fannin 'asharah, al-haddu wa al-mowdhu'u thumma al-thamarah, wa fadhluhu wa nisbatun wa al-wadh'i wa al-ismu istimdadu hukmu al-shar'i, masa'ilun wa al-ba'dhu bi al-ba'dhi iktafa, wa man dara al-jam'a haza al-sharafa*. Contemporary scholar Shaykh Hamza Yusuf (beloved to me) beautifully renders the Arabic into English as: “Each science contains these ten elements: the essence (definition), its subject, and benefits; its virtues, relations and source, its name, whence it draws, legal force; add topics and all will suffice; the master of these is blessed twice.”

²⁰² Some of the greatest classical texts of Sufism are: *Kitab al-Luma'* (*The Book of Flashes*) by Abu Nasr al-Sarraj; *Kitab al-Ta'arruf li Mathhab al-Tasawwuf* (*The Exploration of the Sufi Method*) by Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi; *Kitab al-'Ilm* (*The Book of Knowledge*) and *Qut al-Qulub* (*The Sustenance of the Hearts*) by Abu Talib al-Makki; *Kashf al-Mahjub* (*The Revelation of Veiled Realities*) by 'Ali b. 'Uthman Hujwiri; *Al-Risala al-Qushayriyya* (*The Epistle of Qushayri*) by Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri; *Manazil al-Sa'irin* (*Stations of the Wayfarers*) by 'Abd Allah al-Ansari; *Kitab Sharh 'Aja'ib al-Qalb* (*The Marvels of the Heart*) by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali; *Mahasin al-Majalis* (*The Beauties of Spiritual Sitzings*) by Ibn al-'Arif; and *'Awarif al-Ma'arif* (*The Benefits of Intimate Knowledge*) by Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi. See: John Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004) where the author translates portions from all of these classics.

²⁰³ Quoted from: Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer's Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 25 (citation is given as 'Awarif al-ma'arif, 43).

²⁰⁴ *ibid*, 26 (citation is given as *al-Risala al-Qushayriyya*, 127).

inwardly purify ourselves with virtue (تصفية البواطن من الرذائل بأنواع الفضائل), to pass away from creation through consciousness of the Creator and then to return. Its beginning is knowledge (علم), its middle practice (عمل), and its end a gift (موهبة) [from God].”²⁰⁵

According to Al-Jilani, “You must earn the wealth of this world by lawful means, but set it on the palms of your hands, not in the core of your heart.”²⁰⁶ Al-Kattani said, “Sufism is morality. If someone surpasses you in morality, he surpasses you in purity (صفاء).”²⁰⁷

Al-Tustari said, “(The Sufi) is detached from human beings in his devotion to Allah and gold and clay are one and the same to him.”²⁰⁸ An-Nuri said that Sufism is “*the cultivation of the characteristics of Allah*.”²⁰⁹ In his book *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 438/1037) refers to the ascetic (زاهد), servant (عابد), and direct knower (عارف): the first abstains from the temptations of the world; the second devotes himself to a life of worship; and the third is “totally immersed in the contemplation of the splendor of his Lord.”²¹⁰ Al-Naqshbandi says, “This individual is a Sufi.”²¹¹

In medieval times poets would often times claim, “Today Sufism is a name without a reality, but formerly it was a reality without a name.” However, I would argue that what later scholars would call *al-Sufiyya* or *al-tasawwuf*, the angel Gabriel called “*al-Ihsan*” (الاحسان) in the famous *Hadith* Jibril. The Prophet defined *al-Ihsan* as

²⁰⁵ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 2.

²⁰⁶ Quoted from: Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 26 (citation is given as *al-Risala al-Qushairiyya*, 127).

²⁰⁷ *ibid*, 27.

²⁰⁸ *ibid*, 26 (citation is given as ‘*Awafif al-ma’arif*, 43 and *Tadhkirat al-awliya*’, 264) According to a *hadith* of Ahmad, the Prophet Muhammad said that Jesus Christ asked his disciples, “Are stone, clay, and gold equal in your eyes?” They replied, “Certainly not!” Jesus responded, “They are in mine.” See: Hamza Yusuf, *Walk on Water* (Berkeley: Zaytuna College, 2009), 7.

²⁰⁹ *ibid*, 28 (citation is given as *Tadhkirat al-awliya*’).

²¹⁰ *ibid*, 16.

²¹¹ *ibid*.

“worshipping God as though you can see Him; and if you can’t see Him, indeed He sees you.”²¹² In other words, it is to worship God as if raptured in His Beatific Vision. *Al-Ihsan* is the transcendental and relational aspect of Islam that focuses on making oneself beloved to God by purifying and mastering the self. Furthermore, Al-Sarraj (d. 456/1063) in his *Kitab al-Luma’* mentions that Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728), a student of the Prophet’s Companion ‘Ali b. Abu Talib (d. 40/661) and reportedly also (a student) of the great female saint (وليّة) Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 185/801), said, “I saw a *Sufi* during the circumambulation of the Ka’bah, so I gave him something, but he did not accept it and said, ‘I have with me four small coins, so what I have with me will suffice me.’”²¹³ This is evidence that the word “Sufi” appeared even as early as the first century of the Prophet’s *hijra* (migration to Medina).

According to Al-Naqshbandi, when it comes to the Qur’an, the “eminent figures of Sufism... are unanimously agreed that Sufism is wisdom (حكمة),”²¹⁴ as in the verse: “It is He who has sent among the unlettered folk a Messenger from among themselves, to recite to them His Signs (آياته) and to purify them (يزكّيهم), and to teach them the Book (الكتاب) and Wisdom (الحكمة)” (Q 62:2); “His Signs” and purity being akin to “the Book (the Qur’an)” and “Wisdom” respectively. This correlation is also seen in Q 3:48 in which the speaker (God) says about Jesus, “And We will teach him the Book (*al-Kitab*) and Wisdom (*al-hikma*), the Torah and the Gospel,” with “the Book” being analogous to “the Torah (*al-Tawrah*)” and “Wisdom” with “the Gospel (*al-Injil*).” In other words, the

²¹² أن تعبد الله كأنك تراه فإن لم تكن تراه فإنه يراك (Hadith of Bukhari and Muslim).

²¹³ Quoted from: Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 1-2.

²¹⁴ ibid, 17 (citation is given as *al-Luma’* of Abu ‘n-Nasr as-Sarraj at-Tusi, 42).. The Prophet is reported to have said, “Faith is Yemeni; Wisdom is Yemeni” (الإيمان يمني، الحكمة يمانية). This *hadith* (Bukhari) was one of the major reasons why I chose to study with the Ba’Alawi *sadat* in Tarim, Yemen.

Gospel is true Jewish mysticism; it is “Jewish Sufism” as espoused by Jesus Christ and his Disciples and confirmed by Muhammad and his Companions.

Although I would agree that Sufism entered into a new phase of crystallization at the time of the Baghdadi masters, such as Junayd, Kharraz, and Nuri, Sufism was certainly not invented by these men. Nor am I convinced, as many Western scholars contend, that major elements of Sufi *sacra doctrina* were outright stolen and somehow assimilated into Islam during this period from Christianity, Hinduism, or Platonism, and then subsequently accepted as “Qur’an-truth” by the vast majority of Sunni scholastics. If there happen to be parallels, and in fact there are many, this is simply indicative of the Qur’an’s principle of “progressive revelation,” namely, that every nation received a prophet, and that remnants of their teachings continued to echo well into the Islamic period, and that these remnants were eventually confirmed and deemed as being well-grounded in the Qur’an and Sunnah by the authoritative ‘ulema. In fact, it was Junayd who said, علمنا هذا مقيد بكتاب الله و سنة رسوله (Our sacred gnosis is tied to the Book of God and the Precedent of His Apostle). For Junayd, Sufism is founded upon eight qualities exemplified by eight prophets, the “prototypes of the Sufis” according to Schimmel.²¹⁵ Thus Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq’s (d. 148/765) view that the Qur’an contains four levels of meaning (expression [لفظ], allusions [اشارات], subtleties [لطائف], and realities [حقائق]) and its resemblance to the Christian “fourfold sense of scripture” as literal, allegorical, tropological (moral), and spiritual (eschatological), is in no way bothersome for Muslim scholars; this view was determined to be well-situated in authoritative texts and therefore

²¹⁵ These are: the generosity of Abraham; the acquiescence of Ishmael; the patience of Job; the symbolism of Zacharias; the strangerhood of John; the pilgrimhood of Jesus; the wearing of wool by Moses; and the poverty of Muhammad. See: Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2011), 14-15.

adopted by the likes of Al-Muhasibi (d. 243/847), Al-Tustari (d.283/896), and others. In fact, Renard attributes this fourfold understand to the Companion Ibn ‘Abbas (d. 68/687) and even cites a *hadith* of Sulami in which the eminent Imam ‘Ali (d. 40/661) gives his confirmation of it,²¹⁶ the one about whom the Prophet said, “‘Ali is with the Qur’an and the Qur’an is with ‘Ali.”²¹⁷

The Prophet as the Way (الطريقة), the Truth (الحقيقة), and the Life (الشريعة)

The “verse of examination” quoted above (Q 3:31) is the true theological anchor of Sufism, or Islamic spirituality. From the standpoint of syntactical exegesis, the verse begins with an imperative verb in the second-person masculine singular – “*Qul!*” (Say!), followed by a conditional particle (ان), meaning “if.” The protasis “(if) you love God” is followed by the apodosis “(then) follow me” (اتبعوني), with the verb as second-person plural and in the imperative mood. The next clause, beginning with a verb in the jussive mood (يحبيكم), denotes a result, and is a common grammatical construction in the Qur’an. Thus the Arabic here may be rendered in English as “*in order that* God might love you and forgive you your sins.” The verse is unequivocal; the Prophet’s path is the only path arriving at God’s love.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ John Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology*, 59-60.

²¹⁷ This *hadith* is narrated by Umm Salamah and related by Imam Al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505) in his *Tarikh al-Khulafah al-Rashidin*.

²¹⁸ It should be noted that ‘Abd Qadir al-Jaza’iri (d. 1300/1883) said that love of God is of various kinds. Generally theologians maintain that when God chose to create humanity and sustain them bodily and spiritually, this was due to His incomprehensible mercy (*rahma*); a mercy that is akin to love, or rather His “general love.” There is also the “love of the elite” for believers in Him and His Messenger and the “love of the elite of the elite” for His Prophets and saints. In this view, Q 3:31 does not deny that God loves humanity in general, but rather discloses to us the method of capturing His special love (*mahabbah khasah*). See: Imam Muhammad b. Nasir al-Dari, *Al-Du’a al-Nasiri, The Prayer of the Oppressed*, translation and introduction by Hamza Yusuf (Berkeley: Sandala, 2010), 35-37.

This is not to say that orthodox Islam advocates salvific exclusivism. Ash’arite theologians, such as Al-Ghazali, maintain that it is only after the establishment of four requisites that a person becomes

Scholars of Qur’anic exegesis (تفسير), following the principle of *tafsir bi al-riwayah* (exegesis by transmission), point out the fact that the key verb used in our anchor verse commanding Muslims to follow (*ittiba’a*) the Prophet is the very same verb used in 6:153 where the Qur’an says: “And this is My straight path (*sirati mustaqim*), so follow it (اتبعوه),” or rather “so follow *him*.” The proposition that the Prophet Muhammad is called “the straight path” is very significant especially when we consider the fact that every Muslim on earth recites the opening chapter of the Qur’an (*Al-Fatihah*) in every single unit of prayer in which he entreats God to “Guide us unto the straight path” (*Ehdina al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*, اهدنا الصراط المستقيم [Q 1:6]); in essence saying, “Make us *like* (ομοιος) the Prophet (Muhammad).”

Salafi-oriented Muslims who take very strong exception to pronouncing the Prophet’s name or title after any type of vocative particle, believing it to be rank idolatry (شرك), and who tend to rattle off their prayers without a sense of contemplation (تدبر), may in fact find it disturbing that the prayer itself contains a direct address to the Prophet! – “*As-salamu ‘alaykum ayyuhannabiyyu*, ” السلام عليك ايها النبي (“Peace be upon you O Prophet”). Obviously this should never be understood in a sense that Muslims worship the Prophet or that the Prophet possesses qualities that qualify him as Deity. Sunnite orthodoxy has always maintained that there is no *sharing* (κοινων) of God’s essence (ذات [ουσια]), attributes (صفات), and actions (افعال [εργα]). However, the Prophet, by virtue of being God’s Beloved (*Al-Habib*), possesses special created qualities that enable him to

charged with becoming a Muslim. These four requisites of *taklif* (responsibility) are: 1) *Aql* (sound intellect) 2) *Bulugh* (maturity) 3) *Salamat al-hawas* (sound senses [meaning either deaf or blind and not deaf and blind]) 4) *Balaghat-hu al-da’wat al-sahihah* (the potential proselyte was reached by a sound prophetic summons). People who do not meet these requisites will fall under the banner of God’s amnesty and are considered “safe” (*najun*) from the Fire.

persist as God's chosen means (وسيلة) for salvation and eternal life even after his mortal death. The Prophet said in an absolutely sound *hadith*, "Your deeds are shown to me (while in my grave); if I find good, I praise God; if I find evil, I ask God to forgive you."²¹⁹ In other sound transmission he said, "An angel is seated at my head who conveys to me your benedictions upon me... except on Fridays when I will hear them with my own ear, and answer them with my one tongue."²²⁰ Indeed amongst the many reported charismatic talents (*karamat*) of the Sufi masters is the ability to hear the Prophet's reply to their benedictions upon him. The Prophet's palpable presence in the lives of the spiritual masters is intimated by a remarkable statement attributed to the Sufi Master and eponym of the Shadhili order Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili: "If the Messenger of God were veiled from me for (the time equal to) the twinkling of an eye, I would not even consider myself a Muslim."²²¹ In this regard, Muhammad and the Johannine Jesus are similar; "whereas the Synoptics call for a focus on learning about the religious experience of Jesus and the effects of his ministry, John focuses on experiencing Jesus spiritually and learning from him in an ongoing sense."²²² Thus Kysar is incorrect when he suggests that Christianity is unique among the religions in the sense that one is to experience its *founder* rather than (or in addition to) experiencing the *experience* of its founder.²²³

The Prophet's actualized post-mortem (برزخ) connection to his nation (أمة) is further expressed by a multiply-attested (متواتر) *hadith* in which he said, "Whoever sees

²¹⁹ *Hadith* of al-Bazzar) تعرض علي أعمالكم إن وجدت خيرا حمدت الله وإن وجدت شرا أستغفرت لكم

²²⁰ *Hadith* of Ibn Hibban) إن عند رأسي ملك يبلغني صلوات علي من أمتي إلا يوم الجمعة فأسمع بأذني وأرد بلساني

²²¹ لو غاب عني رسول الله طرفة عين ما عدت نفسي من المسلمين

²²² Paul N. Anderson, "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John's Christological Tensions," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 336.

²²³ Robert Kysar, *John, The Maverick Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993), 55.

me in a dream has truly seen me, for Satan cannot imitate me,”²²⁴ or in another version in Bukhari, “Whoever sees me (in a dream) has seen the truth (*al-haqq*, الحق).”²²⁵ For those who maintain that the Prophet was simply a postman of sorts, delivering as it were the mail from God and then disappearing without a trace into the abyss of death, have yet to adequately explain why the Prophet continues to make *true* appearances to his followers in their dreams (منام) and woken states (يقظة) even until today. They have yet to adequately explain why the Prophet continues to reach out to his nation by God’s permission. It is well known among all Muslims that both al-Bukhari (d. 256/870) and al-Busiri (d. 693/1294) were cured of their respective ailments due to visitations of the Prophet in their dreams. Thus is my contention that the spiritual teachings espoused by the Prophet Muhammad himself can only be adequately understood through the lens of Islam’s normative theo-mystical tradition; a tradition that renders the words (اقوال), actions (افعال), and tacit approvals/disapprovals (تقارير) of the Prophet (his *Sunnah*) indispensable pillars of the religion: “I am the Master (*Sayyid*) of the children of Adam, and this is no boast.”²²⁶ Our analysis of the phenomenon known as Sufism, which is rooted in Muhammadan theophany, will be based upon the rightly-guided articulations of normative scholars representing Muslim orthodoxy who have been recognized as authoritative generation after generation for the last fourteen centuries.

Mystical Union

²²⁴ من رأي في المنام فقد رأي في الشيطان لا يتمثل بي (*Hadith* of Bukhari & Muslim).

²²⁵ من رأي في المنام فقد رأي الحق (*Hadith* of Bukhari & Muslim).

²²⁶ أنا سيد ولد آدم ولا فخر (*Hadith* of Ibn Majah).

The Muhammadan way is the path to mystical union (*unio mystica*) with God; it is the *telos* of human lives in the world, true *eudaimonia*, and a foretaste of the bliss of the Meeting (اللقاء) and Beatific Vision (*visio beatifica*, الرؤيا) in the Hereafter (الآخرة). This union of humanity (*nasut*, ناسوت) with the divine (*lahut*, لاهوت)²²⁷ should never be thought of as a literal merging of being (*henosis* or *ittihad*) as in Nirguna Brahmanism or Sikhism in which the aspirant comes to realize that *atman* essentially equals Brahman or Waheguru, thus ending the cycle of *samsara* (metempsychosis) and becoming absorbed *in divinis* as a drop of water into a vast ocean. Mystical union in Islam is not the non-dualistic *moksha* of Adi Shankara, referred to as the “Mysticism of Infinity” by Schimmel, in which personal identity is totally lost. Rather it is the perfection of one’s identity, transformed and transfigured, in which man retains his status as creation and God as Creator – the “Mysticism of Personality.”²²⁸

Unfortunately, the idea of *Wahdat ul-Wujud* (Oneness of Being or “objective theomonism”²²⁹) attributed to systematic theologian and metaphysician Muhyidin Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 638/1240) is often misrepresented by spiritual novices and scholars of Western academy as one that advocates monistic, pantheistic, or panentheistic notions of God. This gross misunderstanding of “the Great Master” (الشيخ الأكبر) originates from a jarring non-realization that Ibn al-‘Arabi is speaking of Sufism from an elevated vista of fruition and illuminatory experience (*tasawwuf dhawqi* [ذوقي]) and that a crucial requisite for

²²⁷ Aresmouk and Fitzgerald mention in their commentary of Ibn ‘Ajibah’s *The Book of Ascension*: “The term *lahut* is said [to] to derived from the verb *laha*, “to shimmer or gleam,” and originally described the appearance of a mirage on the horizon. According to some Arab grammarians this verb also means “to be hidden.” The dictionary *Lisan al-‘Arab* mentions that Sibawayhi admits the possibility that the name Allah is related to this verb.” Cf. Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism* (*Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf*), translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 60, note 95.

²²⁸ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 5.

²²⁹ This is Mayer’s translation; cf. Toby Mayer, “Theology and Sufism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 275.

understanding his writings correctly involves that the aspirant himself experience similar illuminations. As we have quite often seen, the failure to meet this requisite has prompted charges of heresy and disbelief from many of his ignorant Muslim readers²³⁰ while claims of absolute soteriological inclusivism and perennialism reverberate from his non-Muslim ones. Thus his descriptions of annihilation (*fana'*, فناء) in the love and contemplation of God can only be apprehended by those who have already “tasted” (*dhaqa*, ذاق) it and savored its realities of connection (طعم الاتصال) and union (طعم الجمع), to use the terminology of Herati Master Khwaja ‘Abdullah al-Ansari (d. 481/1089) in his *Manazil al-Sa'irin*.²³¹ When questioned by a skeptic about the veracity of *fana'*, Ibn al-‘Arabi responded by asking his questioner how he knew that honey was sweet. “You taste it,” the skeptic replied - “Exactly! You taste it.”

Mystical union involves a process of “divinization” (*theosis*) in which the aspirant comes to mirror God’s very character and actions; he has actualized the objective of life and is counted amongst those who have arrived (واصلون) and thus attained the sanctified rank of sainthood (ولاية). His purified heart becomes a polished mirror (مرآة)²³² into which the divine attributes are reflected unto the rest of creation. He becomes divine in all respects except ontologically because *lahut* and *nasut* are never mingled (*anepimiktoi*) and remain perpetually distinct (*xenos*)²³³ from one another. Since it is inconceivable for God Himself to incarnate (تجسد) into his own creation, attainment of *wilayah* must come

²³⁰ Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505) was amongst the great classical scholars who defended the Ibn al-‘Arabi, calling him a “*wali Allah*” (saint of God) in his *Tanbih al-Ghabi*.

²³¹ Shaikh ‘Abdullah al-Ansari, *Stations of the Wayfarers*, translated by Hisham Rifa’i (Paris: Dar Albouraq, 2011), 179.

²³² Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Sharh ‘Aja’ib al-Qalb, The Marvels of the Heart*. Translated by Walter James Skellie (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010), 36.

²³³ These are Aruis’ terms. Cf. *Thalia*; Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 1.17.

through the emulation of His divine agent – one who exegetes the Deity. For Muslims, this is the Master Muhammad, the perfected reflection of God’s very character, will, and actions albeit in a non-absolute and contingent way.

In contrast to the Nietzschean *Übermensch* who draws all men towards the ephemeral, this “Perfect Man” (الانسان الكامل), as Ibn al-‘Arabi calls him, is a medium through which the everlasting God is known and manifested; he is the “Supreme Boundary”²³⁴ (البرزخ الأعلى), a divine soul (*ruh*) tented in flesh, the locus of a Muslim’s “affirming difference” (*tanzih*) and “affirming resemblance” (*tashbih*).²³⁵ Muhammad is God’s very immanence; the one who reveals the *ethos* of his Lord and mirrors the pleroma of His majestic (جلالي) and beautiful (جمالي) attributes as much as is possible for a human being. He is the quintessential Adamic creature who said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Truth.”²³⁶ This is the meaning of the apocryphal *hadith qudsi*²³⁷ in which God says, “I am Ahmad without the ‘m’” (انا احمد بلا ميم); God is “*Ahad*,” unique, perfect, uncreated (*agenetos*), and *without origin* (*agennetos*) while the Prophet is “Ahmad,” near perfect, diminutive, derived, created (*genetos*), *originated* (*gennetos*). Thus it is only through the *imitatio Muhammadi* that one may draw near unto God.

Consider Augustine’s (d. 430 CE) famous statement, “God became man so that man might become god” (Lat: *Factus est Deus homo, ut homo fieret deus*).²³⁸ The first half of the statement is meant literally; God (with a capital “g” or “o θεος” in Greek)

²³⁴ Ibn al-‘Arabi, *al-Futuhāt*, 1911 edition, 3:274.28.

²³⁵ Winter, ed., *Classical Islamic Theology*, 6.

²³⁶ See note forty-one above.

²³⁷ A *hadith qudsi*, or “sacred dictum,” is an extra-Qur’anic statement of God reflecting His *ipsissima vox*. This is in contrast to the Qur’an which records His “very words” (*ipsissima verba*). This distinction is similar to the difference between the Torah (*Chumash*) and the *Kettubim* of the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible). See: Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 199-210.

²³⁸ *De Incarnatione* 54:3.

incarnated into man (Jesus Christ) thus becoming human in all respects except ontologically – God retained His divine nature (*ousia*) while hypostatically Son; they are “co-substantial” (*homoousios*) to use Niceo-Constantinopolitan nomenclature. The second half of the statement states that the purpose of the Incarnation was to provide man (humanity at large) an ideal, a paragon of virtue to be emulated: Jesus Christ. Thus the believer might become Christ-like in all respects except ontologically, since Christ was essentially God – “so that man might become god” (with a small “g,” [θεός] meaning divinized). This is not an “absorption” into God’s Essence (*henosis*, اتحاد); one does not become God ontologically. Augustine, the author of *De Trinitate*, obviously believed that Jesus Christ was God, thus of “one substance” (*homoousios*; *consubstantialis*) with the Father. Paul of Samosata (d. 275 CE), however, the Dynamic Monarchian (Adoptionist) bishop of Antioch and predecessor of Lucian (d. 312 CE) described Christ’s union with God as “unity of will and energy (activity)” produced by “an attitude of love” ... a “unity and sameness of approval and well-pleasingness.”²³⁹ For Paul of Samosata, *this* is exactly the type of union that all other human beings may experience as well.

The problematic elements of Augustine’s statement when considered from a Muslim lens are obvious. It is a logical inconceivability for God to become man since God is by His *very nature* absolute and independent of all things including food, water, gravity, clothing, death, etc. God is *necessarily* outside of time, space, and matter because He brought these things into existence *ex nihilo*. Ash'ari said: “God is not in His creatures nor are His creatures in Him.”²⁴⁰ A corporeal or “enfleshed” (جسماني) god who resides in

²³⁹ *Discourses to Sabinus*, IV.

²⁴⁰ Quoted from Nader El-Birzi, "God: Essence and Attributes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 129, citing Michel Allard, *Le probleme des attributs divins la doctrine d'al-Ash'ari* (Beirut, 1965), p. 199.

the temporal world is as paradoxical as hot ice cubes and four-sided triangles. Muslims would rather say, “God inspired man, so that man might become god (lordly, sanctified, or divinized) (أوحى الله الإنسان ليكون ربانيا).” The latter half of the statement indicates the process of divinization, or to make oneself “godlike” in one’s character, will, and actions. Christ said according to Matthew 5:48, “Therefore be perfect (τελειοι) just as your Father, the One in the heavens, is perfect (τελειος).”²⁴¹ Classical exegete al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505) mentions in his Qur’an commentary *al-Jalalayn* that the occasion of revelation (سبب النزول) of Q 3:79²⁴² was when a *Nasari* (Christian)²⁴³ approached the Companions of the Prophet and claimed “that Jesus ordered them to take him as Lord” (ان عيسى امرهم ان يتخذوه ربا). The Qur’an answered that no one endowed with the prophetic office would ever order such a thing but would rather command “Be *lordly*” (كونوا ربانيين),²⁴⁴ or as the Prophet Muhammad said in a *hadith*, “Adorn yourselves with the character of God” (تخلقوا باخلاق الله).²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ See also Gen. 17:1: “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be *perfect*” (*Ani El-Shaddai, hith-halayk l’phanai vihyeh tamim*).

²⁴² “It is not for a human [prophet] that God should give him the Scripture, Wisdom, and the prophetic office and then he would say to the people, ‘Be servants to me rather than God,’ but [instead, he would say], ‘Be lordly - because of what you have taught of the Scripture (the Bible in this case) and because of what you have studied.’”

²⁴³ It is interesting to note that the Qur’an does not call the followers of Christ *Χριστιανοι* or “Christians” (*Masihiyun*) from the trilateral root M-S-H as in “Messiah;” it rather uses the word “*Nasara*” which seems to be the Arabic cognate of the more ancient Hebrew designation “*Notzrim*” (Nazarenes) – one of the objects of the “maledictions against the heretics” (*birkat ha-minim*) instituted by the rabbinical academy at Yavneh after the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 CE. See: Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1993), 21. Early “Judeo-Christians” were also referred to as *Evyonim* (Ebionites) by proto-orthodox Christians, meaning “spiritual paupers” due to their realization of being absolutely impoverished before God. The early Sufis were also called spiritual paupers (*fugara*) as well as ascetics (*zuhhad*), strangers (*ghuraba*), recluses (*shukufiyya*), and “hungry” (*jaw’iyya*). The Sufis were also known to ride donkeys and wear white woolen (*suffiy*) clothing. In fact the word *hawariy*, the Qur’anic word for a disciple of Jesus, means to “make white” or “wear white.”

²⁴⁴ Q 3:79. Al-Suyuti points out that the additions of *alif* and *nun* in *rabbaniyyin* indicate a superlative form as distinct from the regular *rabbiiyyin*. Cf. *al-Jalalayn*, 3:79.

²⁴⁵ Although this *hadith* is often quoted by scholars of Sufism, there is some weakness in its transmission. See: Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 99.

The Proof of Islam

Perhaps the best theologian with respect to our study of mystical union is Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), the “Proof of Islam” (حجة الاسلام) and great Renewer (مجدد) of the fifth Islamic century.²⁴⁶ In his “spiritual” autobiography, *Munqidh min al-Dhalal* (*The Deliverance from Error*), which has often been compared to St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, Al-Ghazali tells us that after experiencing a major spiritual crisis that left him unable to teach, he came to realize through renunciation, sojourn, and incessant studies that it was the Sufis, the lords of experience (ارباب الاحوال), who held the key to the actualization (تحقيق) of faith and not the systematic theologians (متكلمون or *ahl al-aqwal* [men of words]),²⁴⁷ philosophers (فلاسفة), or esotericists (باطنيون).²⁴⁸ In addition to being the author of Islam’s Summa Theologica, *Ihya ‘Ulum ‘al-Din* (The Revivification of the Sacred Sciences),²⁴⁹ the most comprehensive exposition of classical

²⁴⁶ In the *Munqidh min al-Dhalal*, Al-Ghazali states that he acquired knowledge of Sufic realities from his perusal of the books of the great mystical Masters: Abu Talib al-Makki, Al-Harith al-Muhasibi, Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd, Al-Shibli, and Abu Yazid al-Bistami. The great commentator of the *Ihya*, Al-Sayyid al-Murtada al-Zabidi (d. 1205/1790) wrote a lengthy biography of Imam Al-Ghazali entitled *Ithaf al-Sada al-Muttaqin bi Sharh Asrar Ihya ‘Ulum al-Din*.

²⁴⁷ Muhammad Abul Quasem, *The Ethics of Al-Ghazali: A Composite Ethics in Islam* (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1978), 20.

²⁴⁸ The esotericists that Al-Ghazali was referring to were Isma’ili Shiites who rejected the outward (*thahiri*) meaning of Scripture. Al-Ghazali is adamant that the Qur’an has both an inward (esoteric) dimension as well as an outward (exoteric) dimension. He says, و للقرآن ظاهر وباطن (The Qur’an has an outward and an inward). See Al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights*, A parallel English-Arabic text translated by David Buchman (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 32. He calls these aspects ‘ibara and ishara alternatively. See: Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Sharh ‘Aja’ib al-Qalb, The Marvels of the Heart*. Translated by Walter James Skellie (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010).

²⁴⁹ Al-Ghazali’s magnum opus, the *Ihya*, contains forty volumes with Book XX considered to be its heart – *The Book on the Proprieties of Living and Prophetic Characteristics* (*Kitab Adab al-Ma’ishah wa Akhlaq al-Nabuwwah*). Al-Ghazali seems to have oriented the *Ihya* around the Qur’an with respect to the centrality of the Prophet; the title of the thirty-sixth *surah*, *Ya-Sin*, believed to be one of the names of the Prophet Muhammad, is considered to be the “heart of the Qur’an.” These enigmatic “disjointed letters” (*huruf al-muqata’ah*) have been the object of much exegetical speculation. In *Kitab al-Shifa*, ‘Qadhi ‘Iyad (d. 544/1149) mentions that Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq believed them to stand for “*Ya Sayyid!*” (“O Master!”). And God knows best.

Islam ever written and, coupled with the Qur'an, are considered to be sufficient as an entire curriculum by some Sufi orders²⁵⁰ including the *Ba'Alawi* of Tarim,²⁵¹ al-Ghazali also explores the path to mystical union in his writings on practical Sufism (*tasawwuf 'amali* [عملي])²⁵² which have also become the *loci classici* on the subject for the global Sunnite Muslim community.

Al-Ghazali begins by asking if it is even possible for God and man to become one. Is it by forming a third unit composed of both? Or is it by the transformation of one party, in this case the spiritual aspirant, so that his humanity becomes more and more truncated until it falls out altogether? In other words, is it the (orthodox) Christ of Chalcedon (451 CE) who has one *hypostasis* and two *physeis* or is it the Christ of the Monophysite ("one physis") Churches? For al-Ghazali, it is emphatically neither. At the absolute heart of his theology is the radical uniqueness and utter dissimilarity (مخالفة) of God; if we might return to the language of the proto-orthodox Christian creeds, the "Father" and "Son" are *heteroousios*. Al-Ghazali confirms the Qur'an's celebrated statement, "*Laysa ka-mithlihi shay'un, wa huwa al-Sami' al-Basir*, ليس كمثلته شيء و هو السميع البصير" ("There is not like the likes of Him anything, while He is the All-Hearing,

²⁵⁰ Many Sufis advise, "If you have to sell your *lihya* (beard), get the *Ihya*."

²⁵¹ The Ba'Alawi order (*tariqah 'Alawiyya*) *asadat* (sing. *sayyid*, descendants of the House of the Prophet [*ahl al-Bayt*]) of Yemen trace their lineage back to Sayyid Ahmad b. 'Isa al-Muhajir (d. 345/956) who emigrated to Hadramawt from the Abassid city of Basra around 317/929 in order to preserve the prophetic heritages. His shrine is located atop a small hill between Seiyun and Tarim and is usually the first stop of students and visitors enroute to Tarim, "the city of light." His illustrious descendants include Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Faqih al-Muqaddam (d. 653/1232), Shaykh Abu Bakr b. Salim (d. 992/1583), Imam 'Abd Allah b. 'Alawi al-Haddad (d. 1132/1720), as well as contemporary scholars Habib 'Umar b. Hafiz (Director of Dar al-Mustafa in Tarim) and Habib 'Ali al-Jifri. See: Walter Dostal & Wolfgang Kraus, editors, *Shattering Tradition: Custom, Law and the Individual in the Muslim Mediterranean* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005) and Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Also see: *Sufis of the Valley* by Amin Buxton.

²⁵² At times in the *Ihya*, al-Ghazali will titillate his readers with short comments suggesting his arrival at *tasawwuf dhawqi*, but then chooses not to elaborate. Contemporary scholar Shaykh Hamza Yusuf has referred to these teasers as the "white whale" of the *Ihya*.

the All-Seeing” (Q 42:11.5). The first half of the statement, explicitly declaring the transcendence of God, is followed by a conjunction *waw* which may be interpreted as the beginning of a circumstantial subordinate clause (hence the translation “while”) thus declaring God’s immanence as well.²⁵³ The immanence of God, however, does not signify His nearness (*qurb*, قرب) in space-time, but rather His concern for humanity and their affairs; Seeing and Hearing them from His elevated vista as it were. Junayd, who wrote many short treatises on divine unity and exerted great influence upon al-Ghazali, was able to escape the inquisition and Sufi witch-hunts of the Baghdadi traditionalist Ghulam Khalil (d. 275/888) by defining *tawhid* (oneness or unification) as “the isolation of the Eternal from the created” (افراد القدم عن الحدث).²⁵⁴

The Mystical Path

The goal of the mystical path is to actualize one’s faith by disciplining (*takhliyya*, تخلية), ornamenting (*tahliyya*, تحلية), and divinizing (*tajliyya*, تجلية) the lower self (*nafs*); an actualization termed by al-Ghazali as *tahqiq* (intuitive cognition) or *dhawq*, literally “tasting.” The aspirant is expected to experience theopanies (تجليات) and unveilings

²⁵³ Islamic theology is quite often misrepresented by Christian fundamentalist authors as being almost Deistic (or henotheistic) with Allah characterized as an unreachable deity or even as a tyrant who wants “slaves rather than sons.” Other passages in the Qur’an which demonstrate God’s immanence include Q 50:16.5: “We are closer (*aqrabu*) to the human being than his jugular vein;” Q 2:186.1: When my servants ask you concerning Me (say that) I am indeed close (*qarib*) to them.” Interestingly, Al-Ghazali denounced Deism which he considered to be a type of philosophy and called its adherents naturalists (*tabi’iyyun*); these are philosophers who acknowledge a Creator yet deny His immanent aspect. This impersonal God was called “the Good” by Plato (*Respublica* 505a-509b), “the Unmoved Mover” by Aristotle (*Metaphysica* 1072a21-27), and “the One” by Plotinus (*Enn.* V.4.1). Toom says: “Readers should note an important difference between Jewish monotheism and pagan henotheism, even though both insisted on the oneness of God. The Greek Ultimate Being was *neuter* (*to on*; Plato, *Timaeus* 27d), whereas a Jewish Platonist Philo insisted that the God of Israel was *masculine* (*ho on*, Exod 3:14). The point was not that YHWH was masculine rather than feminine, but that YHWH was *personal* rather than *impersonal*.” Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 54.

²⁵⁴ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 16.

(مكاشفات) if he submits to the guidance of a spiritual master (*murshid*) who oversees his progress as he ambles upon the mystical path (*tariqah*) rooted in the prophetic experience in search of mystical union (*jama'*) with God and affirmation of His unity (*tawhid*) – humanity's true beatitude. According to the "Eight Rules of Junayd," the aspirant is required to practice: 1) ritual purity; 2) spiritual withdrawal; 3) fasting; 4) silence; 5) recollection of God; 6) rejecting stray thoughts; 7) binding the heart to the Shaykh; 8) surrender to God and the master.²⁵⁵

After experiencing the incomprehensible flashes (*lawami'*) of annihilation, the *muhaqqiq* (active participle of the infinitive *tahqiq*) having now arrived, participates in the "very life of God" (*ad participationem sui ipsius*)²⁵⁶ so that his personal desires and aspirations, his very will in fact, have merged with the perfect will (الإرادة) of God. He becomes God's sanctified agent in the world, His pure action as He interacts with His creation. When he speaks it is "as if" (*ka-anna*) God is speaking; when he walks, it is as if God is walking; when he smiles, it is as if God is smiling. If he is standing in the shade he does not desire the sunlight; if he is standing in the sunlight, he does not desire the shade. Having entered into what Buber called an "*Ich und Du*" (I-Thou)²⁵⁷ relationship/union with God born out of intimate love, the *muhaqqiq* becomes "godly" in his character and actions. His pleasures only lie in adherence to the guidance of God via Muhammad who said, "None of you is a perfect believer until his desires and will are in conformance with what I have brought."²⁵⁸ In *Madarij al-Salikin* the great Damascene

²⁵⁵ *ibid*, 120.

²⁵⁶ "To share in what is His very own" as Aquinas said; see: Jean-Pierre Torrell O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Spiritual Master: Saint Thomas d'Aquin, Maître Spirituel vol. II*, translated by Robert Royal, 114.

²⁵⁷ See: Martin Buber, *I and Thou: A New Translation, with a Prologue and Notes by Walter Kaufmann* (New York: Touchstone, 1970).

²⁵⁸ *Kitab al-Hujjah*; hadith no. 41 in Imam al-Nawawi's '*Arba'een*.'

theologian Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350) wrote, “The highest of the degrees of love is the union of the will of the lover with the will of the Beloved.”²⁵⁹

The character of the *muhaqqiq* is now aligned with the “magnificent character,” خلق عظيم (Q 68:4) of the Prophet Muhammad,²⁶⁰ whose heart is both an illuminated reflector of God’s light (نور), as well as source of light (*siraj muneer* [Q 33:64.5]) illuminating the hearts of the believers. As the moon reflects the light of the majestic sun, likewise the Prophet is a brilliant reflection of his Lord who illuminates the world, for he is the light of the world. Or to use the language of Aquinas (for Christ obviously), “He is the true and perfect image of the Father.”²⁶¹ To quote Paul, he becomes “the image of the Invisible God” (Col. 1:15), “and by definition an image was not isomorphic with its prototype.”²⁶² Mystically inclined exegetes such as Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896) mention that in the Qur’anic verse known as *ayat al-nur* (the verse of the light),²⁶³ “the similitude of His light” (مثل نوره) means “the likeness of the light of Muhammad” (مثل نور محمد). The lamp (مصباح) within the niche (مشكاة) enclosed by a brilliant glass (زجاجة) represents the radiant heart of the Prophet in his chest shining through his providentially purified and protected *fitrah* (innate disposition); a *fitrah* that branched out from the “olive tree” known as Abraham and his blood (oil), who is neither occidental nor oriental but

²⁵⁹ Quoted from: Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 133-134.

²⁶⁰ One of the magnificent supplications of the Ba’Alawi Sufis is: “*Allahumma, salli ‘ala Sayyidina Muhammad; noorika al-sari, wa madadika al-jari, wa ijma’na bihi fi kulli atwarihi, wa ‘ala alihi wa sahbihi ya Nur!*” (O God, bless our Master Muhammad, Your running light, and Your flowing spiritual sustenance, and join us with him in all of his states and stations, and (bless) his family and companions as well, O Light!).

²⁶¹ Jean-Pierre Torrell O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Spiritual Master: Saint Thomas d’Aquin, Maitre Spirituel vol. II*, translated by Robert Royal, 115.

²⁶² Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 82.

²⁶³ “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within a glass, the glass as if it were a brilliant star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light! God guides to His light whom He wills. And God presents examples for the people, and God is the Knower of all things” (Q 24:35).

cosmopolitan (‘*alamiyya*) is his message; a disposition so pure that it would almost arrive at God’s *ma’rifah* (supersensory knowledge) even *without* Revelation (“fire”). And when his *fitrah* is finally lit by fire it is nothing but “light upon light” (نور على نور)! Some two centuries after al-Tustari, al-Ghazali’s cosmology, ontology, and epistemology of light in his *Mishkat al-Anwar*, in which he equates the knowledge of God “with the illumination of the heart by the Divine Light”²⁶⁴ may have even influenced the Illuminationist (*Ishraqi*) philosophy of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra,²⁶⁵ and has been the primary inspiration for what later scholars would call Ghazalian “mirror Prophetology/Christology.”²⁶⁶

According to the mystical Muhammadology of the Ash’arites, Muhammad is the greatest of all created entities (خير خلق الله, or as the Arians used to say about Christ: *ktisma teleion*)²⁶⁷ – a list which includes the mighty archangels Gabriel (*Jibril*) and Michael (*Mika’il*), as well as the magnificent celestial bodies such as the throne (كرسي), the footstool (عرش), and the heavenly Ka’bah (بيت المعمور). The doctrine alternatively known as “the primacy of the Muhammadan light,” “*Fiat Lux*”²⁶⁸ Prophetology” or “the Reality of the Muhammadan nature” (الحقيقة المحمدية), is akin to the *Adam Kadmon* of mystical Judaism and Aquinas’ *primordiale exemplar*, and maintains that the first created substance was the light (نور) of the Prophet, and that from this light, all of the rest of creation was derived. Scholars have pointed to many Qur’anic verses (such as Q 5:15.5;

²⁶⁴ Al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights*, xxvi.

²⁶⁵ *ibid*, xxii (Translator’s Introduction) citing ‘Afifi’s edition of *Mishkat*, 34-35.

²⁶⁶ Alexander Treiger argues that Al-Ghazali’s “mirror Christology” is rooted in the East-Syriac (Nestorian) mysticism of the eighth-century charismatic monk John of Dalyatha. See: Alexander Treiger. Al-Ghazali’s “Mirror Christology” and Its Possible East-Syriac Sources. *The Muslim World*, 2011, pp 698-713. doi: 10.1111/j.1478-1913.2011.01370.x.

²⁶⁷ Arius, *Ep. Alex.*

²⁶⁸ “Let there be light” of Genesis 1:3 (Heb: “*Y’hi or*”).

26:218-219; 33:7.1)²⁶⁹ and prophetic traditions to support such a position such as the Prophet's answer to Maysara al-Dhabbi's question, "When did you become a prophet?," in which he claims to possess ontological precedence over Adam, the first human: "When Adam was between the soul (روح) and the body (جسد)." This *hadith* is found in Ahmad al-Qastallani's (d. 923/1517) treatise *Al-Mawahib al-Ladunniy* along with "I am the Seal of the Prophets, while Adam was still in clay;"²⁷⁰ in essence saying, in the language of the Johannine literature: "Before Adam was, I am" (πριν Αδαμ γενεσθαι, εγω ειμι).²⁷¹ In this vein, Imam Al-Haddad (d. 1132/1720) quoted the couplets of al- 'Abbas (d. 32/653), the Prophet's paternal uncle, who eulogized his nephew by saying:

- من قبلها طبت في الظلال و في مستودع حيث يخصف الورق
Min qabliha tibta fi al-dhilali wa fi mustawda'in hathu yukhsafu al-waraq,
 Anciently you were good in the shadows and in the storehouse when the fig leave was attached,
 - ثم هبطت البلاد لا بشر انت و لا مضغة و لا علق
thumma habatta al-bilada laa basharun anta wa laa mudhghatun wa laa 'alaqu,
 Then you landed on the earth not as a man, nor as a fetal lump, nor as a zygote,
 - بل نطفة تركب السفين و قد الجم نسرا و اهله الغرق
Bal nutfatun tarkabu al-safina wa qad aljama nasran wa ahlahu al-gharaq,
 Rather as a seed riding the Ark while Nasr was defeated and his people drowned,
 - تنتقل من صلب الى رحم اذا مضى عالم بدا طبق
tunqalu min sulubin ila rahimin itha madha 'alamun bada tabaqu.

²⁶⁹ "There has come unto you from God a light (*nur*) and a clear Book" (Q 5:15.5); "It is He who sees you when you stand (in prayer), and your turning about (*taqallubaka*) in those who prostrate" (26:218-219). Imam al-Haddad quotes Ibn 'Abbas who says that this "turning about" is a reference to the "transmission" (*intiqal*) of the Prophet's light from "prophetic loin to prophetic loin" (*min salbin nabiyy ila nabiyy akhar*). See: Al-Habib 'Abd Allah b. 'Alawi al-Haddad al-Hadhrami al-Shaf'i, *Sabil al-Iddikar wa al-'Itimar bimaa Yamurru bi al-Insani wa Yanqadhi lahu min al-'Amar* (Dar al-Hawiy, 1418/1998), 21; "Remember when God took a covenant from the prophets; for you, from Noah, Abraham, Musa, and Jesus the son of Mary" (Q 33:7.1). Qadi 'Iyad interprets the order of prophets mentioned to be their order ontologically, cf. Qadi 'Iyad Ibn Musa al-Yahsubi, *Muhammad Messenger of God: Ash-Shifa of Qadi 'Iyad*, 7th ed., trans. by Aisha Bewley (Madina Press, 2006).

²⁷⁰ *Hadith* in Ahmad. See: Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Qastallani, *Al-Mawahib al-Ladunniy bi al-Minah al-Muhammadiyah*, ed. Salih Ahmad al-Shami (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islami, 1412/1991).

²⁷¹ The Persian poet Nizami (d. 605/1209) said that the word "*anbiya*" (prophets) begins and ends with the *alif* for Ahmad.

You moved from loin to womb; whenever a world passed away, another appeared.²⁷²

And of course there is the famous and strong (حسن)²⁷³ *hadith* of Jabir found in the *Musannaf* of Yemeni *muhaddith* (*hadith* scholar) Abu Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzaq (d. 211/826) in which the Prophet told Jabir, “The first thing God created was the light of your Prophet from His light” (ان الله تعالى خلق قبل الاشياء نور نبيك من نوره)²⁷⁴ Al-Tustari says is his exegesis: “God Most High, when He wished to create Muhammad (the blessings and peace of God upon him), manifested some of His light. When it attained the veil of majesty, it bowed down in prayer before Allah. Allah created from the position of prayer (سجدة) a great column like a glass of light, as both his interior and exterior. In it is the ‘*ayn* (very being, essence, source, and eye) of Muhammad.²⁷⁵

Although there are certainly parallels between mystical *jama’* in Sufism and *theosis* in Eastern Christian Orthodoxy,²⁷⁶ since both religions originated from Allah’s prophets, it is important to remember that these ideas are not the later machinations of “intoxicated,” or “goofy Sufis,” who wanted to appropriate the theo-mystical understandings of the Desert Fathers into Islamic consciousness. Imam Abu al-Qasim al-

²⁷² Al-Habib ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Alawi al-Haddad al-Hadhrami al-Shaf’i, *Sabil al-Iddikar wa al-‘Itimar bimaa Yamurru bi al-Insani wa Yanqadhi lahu min al-‘Amar*, 20.

²⁷³ According to some authorities.

²⁷⁴ According to Rashad Jameer, both Imams Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti and Ahmad b. al-Siddiq al-Ghumari rejected this *hadith*. Jameer considers this *hadith* to be fabricated (موضوع) and falsely attributed to ‘Abd al-Razzaq as no *isnad* (chain of transmission) can be found for its narration. He says, however, “Although this *hadith* is fabricated, many great scholars have declared its meaning to be sound and acceptable.” Imam Yusuf al-Nabahani, *The Virtues of the Prophet and His Nation*, translation and notes by Rashad Jameer (Bukhari, 2014), 32.

²⁷⁵ Quoted from: Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996), 11. See: Muhammad Sahl b. ‘Abd Allah al-Tustari, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-‘Azim* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutab al-Ghabiyya al-Kubra, 1329/1911).

²⁷⁶ The three stages of mystical union in Eastern Orthodoxy are 1) *Catharsis*: purification of the mind and body through monasticism and incessant prayer such as the Jesus Prayer (κυριε Ιησου Χριστε Υιε του θεου ελεησον με τον αμαρτωλον; Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner); 2) *Theoria*: Contemplative prayer as if one is “looking at” God. The aspirant is illuminated by the divine light and given spiritual gifts such as charismata; 3) *Theosis*: (“Divinization”) Union with God born out of love; one becomes divine in all respects except ontologically – in his character, actions, and will. The aspirant is now sanctified by God and becomes His agent of activity in the world.

Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 297/930), known as *Shaykh al-Taa'ifah* (“The Master of the [Sect of] Sufis”), was one of the great articulators of Islam’s mystical tradition. Junayd’s unmistakable orthodoxy is exemplified when we notice that Imam Ibrahim al-Laqqani (d. 470/1078), in his famous formulaic and poetic creedal articulation known as *Al-Jawhara al-Tawhid* (*The Jewel of Monotheism*), mentions Junayd by name: *Wa maalikun wa saa’ir al-a’immatti, katha Abu al-Qasim hudat al-ummati* (“And Malik [Imam of Medina, d. 179/795] and the rest of the Imams, as well as Abu al-Qasim [al-Junayd] and the rest of the guides of the faith community”). According to Professor Winter, the Prophet once appeared to Junayd in a vision and said, “God shall make your words the salvation of a multitude of mankind.”²⁷⁷ Thus Junayd’s Sufism is accepted as normative and well-grounded in definitive sacred sources by the consensus of Sunni theologians. As stated earlier, Junayd himself once declared, *علمنا هذا مقيد بكتاب الله و سنة رسوله* (“Our sacred gnosis is tied to the Book of God and the Precedent of His Apostle”).

The *Ich und Du* relationship of the Prophet Muhammad and his Lord mentioned earlier is subtlety indicated in *Surat al-Tawbah* 9:62 which says, “God and His Messenger – it is more fitting that you (all) should please Him” (*و الله و رسوله احق ان (يرضوه*). A careful reader will notice that the pronominal suffix at the end of the verse, *hu* (third-person singular) does not match the number of subjects (two: God and His Messenger) at the beginning. Who is “Him (*hu*)?” Al-Qurtubi says in his exegesis that “God deemed His pleasure his” (*ان الله جعل رضاه في رضاه*), so that if one were to please the Prophet, he would necessarily please God. Al-Qurtubi then quotes the verse, “Whoever obeys the Messenger, indeed has obeyed God” (Q 4:80). The Prophet said as well,

²⁷⁷ Al-Ghazali, *The Remembrance of Death & the Afterlife. Kitab Dhikr al-Mawt wa maa Ba’dahu*, translated by T.J. Winter (London: Islamic Texts Society, 1997), 298.

“Whoever obeys me obeys God. Whoever disobeys me disobeys God.”²⁷⁸ God and His Messenger are of one heart, yet their equality in this regard does not make them *essentially identical (unius substantiae)*.

We read elsewhere in the Qur’an, “You (all) did not kill them, but it was God who killed them. And you threw not (O Muhammad), when you threw (the stones), but it was God who threw” (Q 8:17.1). No authoritative exegete has ever suggested that God Himself somehow “descended” (κατελθοντα, *descendit*) assumed flesh (σαρκοθεντα, *incarnatus est*) became man (ενανθρωπησαντα, *homo factus est*) and threw a handful of stones at the opposing Qurayshi army. The meaning of the verse is that the Prophet’s actions, as well as his words, are guided and inspired by God. The Prophet as a sanctified agent of God, “never speaks from his own caprice” (Q 53:3);²⁷⁹ he said, “I swear by the One who sent me in truth, nothing escapes from it (my mouth) except the truth (الحق).”²⁸⁰

Three Levels of Union with God, Charismata, & the Diwan

Al-Ghazali mentions that before one may actualize the three levels²⁸¹ of mystical union (*qurb*, *istighraq*, and *fana*’), the aspirant is required to rigorously strive (مجاهدة) to empty (*takhliyya*, *via purgativa*, *catharsis*), adorn (*tahliyya*, *via contemplativa*, *theoria*), and sanctify/” theophanize” (*tajliyya*, *via illuminativa*, *theosis*) the lower mortal self (*nafs*), as previously mentioned. This tripartite requisite of union can be achieved by sitting with the spiritual masters, the true Sufis, and imitating their internal purification

²⁷⁸ من أطاعني فقد أطاع الله ومن عصاني فقد عصى الله (Hadith of Bukhari & Muslim).

²⁷⁹ ما ينطق عن الهوى و. The imperfect tense verb in Arabic is usually negated by the *lam-alif* (“*laa*”), however in this case, we find the *mim-alif* (“*maa*”) preceding the present tense verb “*yantiqu*” (speaks or articulates). This denotes intensity and hence my translation “he *never* speaks from his own caprice.”

²⁸⁰ والذي بعثني بالحق لا يخرج منه إلا الحق

²⁸¹ Fadlou Shehadi, *Ghazali’s Unique Unknowable God: A Philosophical Critical Analysis of Some of the Problems Raised by Ghazali’s View of God as Utterly Unique and Unknowable*, 29-34.

practices (تزكية النفس) by taking from their prescriptive litanies (اوراد), eulogies (صلوات), invocations (ادعية), and recollections (اذكار). Ideally the aspirant will pledge his allegiance (بيعة) to the Shaykh by handclasp (مصافحة) who will then focus his attention on his disciple “to treat the contents of his heart.”²⁸² This practice known as *tawajjuh*, can even be done at a distance where the Shaykh will focus his heart on the heart of the aspirant until the latter feels an intimate “spiritual warmth;” an ecstatic feeling which has been described as a type of spiritual love-making.²⁸³ However even a moment in the presence of a true Sufi may have a profound effect on the aspirant who may perceive lights and insights from the master’s “locution of state” or “mute eloquence” (لسان الحال). Indeed, it was the great Hadhrami mystic Shaykh Abu Bakr b. Salim (d. 992/1583) who once claimed to have changed the destiny of a gruff bedouin with a single glance (*nathrah*). ‘Umar Suhrawardi (d. 631/1234) was given ‘*ilm al-ladunni* (18:65), knowledge directly imparted by God without a mediating agent,²⁸⁴ when an old saint placed his hand upon the young ‘Umar’s chest.²⁸⁵ Al-Ghazali calls these occurrences *karamat* (saintly miracles) and *al-khatir al-rabbani* (lordly suggestions).²⁸⁶ Winston says commenting on Philonic mysticism: “There are others, however, who have succeeded in apprehending

²⁸² Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 63.

²⁸³ Persian mystic Abu Yazid (Bayezid) al-Bistami (d. 260/874) even went so far as to say that if one does not have a Shaykh, “his Shaykh is Satan.” Moroccan mystic and jurist Sidi Ahmad Zarruq (d. 899/1493), however, exhorts the Muslims to take *al-salah ‘ala al-nabi* (benedictions upon the Prophet) as their “Shaykh” should they lack one.

²⁸⁴ The Qur’anic archetype of the possessor of ‘*ilm al-ladunni* is the enigmatic figure of Surah 18 identified in the *hadith* as Khidr: “one We had taught from Our knowledge” (Q 18:65) (وعلّمناه من لدنا علماً). Hamza Yusuf argues quite convincingly that Khidr could have been none other than the Buddha, and attributes this opinion to historian Imam Taj al-Din al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153) in the latter’s *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal*. See: Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, “Buddha in the Qur’an?” in *Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism: Spiritual and Ethical Affinities*, Reza Shah Kazemi, ed., (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010), 113-136.

²⁸⁵ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 17-18.

²⁸⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Sharh ‘Aja’ib al-Qalb, The Marvels of the Heart*, xxxi.

God through himself, without the cooperation of any reasoning process (λογισμος) to lead them to the sight (θεα), and these are the genuine worshipers and friends of God.”²⁸⁷

With respect to the *athkar* (sing. *dhikr*), it begins on the tongue, then moves to the heart as well as the tongue, and then in the “spirit” (روح) and “innermost being” (سر).²⁸⁸ To achieve this total cardiac absorption of God’s remembrance is to achieve the state of the Prophet’s heart whose eyes slept but whose heart was always awake and in the presence of his Lord.²⁸⁹ His wife ‘A’isha once said about him, “He used to remember God in all of his states.”²⁹⁰ The Prophet’s role in the Sufi path cannot be overstated. “The Sufism of Islam is the cultivation of the characteristics of the Chosen One (al-Mustafa, المصطفى), and the illumination obtained from the lights of his noble breast and his gentle heart bestowed upon him by Allah through the expansion of his breast” (Q 94:1).²⁹¹ One who forsakes the Prophetic Precedent and sacred law can have “no real discernment (شعور) even if he had a thousand hallmarks (سعار).”²⁹² Al-Shadhili said, according to al-Sha’rani’s *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, “If your unveiling (كشف) contradicts the Qur’an and Sunna, hold fast to the Qur’an and Sunna and ignore your unveiling.”²⁹³ The great axial sage (قطب) and Hanbalite jurist ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 561/1166) warned his disciples about a man who can “fly through the air” (يطير في الهواء) and “walk on water” (يمشي على)

²⁸⁷ David Winston, “Philo’s Mysticism,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. VIII, ed. David T. Runia (Providence: Brown University Press, 1996), 81.

²⁸⁸ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 29.

²⁸⁹ تناماني عيني ولا ينام قلبي (Hadith of al-Tirmidhi).

²⁹⁰ كان يذكر الله في كل أحيانه

²⁹¹ Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, xviii.

²⁹² ibid.

²⁹³ Quoted from: Sherman Jackson, *Sufism for Non-Sufis? Ibn ‘Ata Allah al-Sakandari’s Taj al-‘Arus*, 7, citing ‘Abd al-Wahhab b. Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Sha’rani, *al-Tabaqat al-kubra* (a.k.a. *Lawaqih al-anwar fi tabaqat al-akhyar*), ed. ‘A.M.’A. al-Fasi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2006), 291. This reminds me of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Methodism in which experience, tradition, and reason are checked against Scripture, which is always primary.

الماء) yet contravenes the sacred law and prophetic example in his actions – “know that he is a charlatan (دجال), a swindler who has missed the path of truth and rightness.”²⁹⁴

True *karamat*, also known as *khawariq al-‘adat* (خوارق العادات), or breaches of natural law, are of two types: those of knowledge (επιστημη); and those of power (δυναμις). The former include piercing insight, clairvoyance, and “the ability to know the thoughts and intents of men,”²⁹⁵ while the latter include healings, levitations, moon-splittings, and resurrections. Both types are only by God’s permission. According to the Hanafite theologian, Imam Abu Ja’far al-Tahawi (d. 321/933), saintly miracles do not rank as high as prophetic miracles (معجزات), yet it is equally incumbent for all Muslims to believe in both types. He says in Λογιον 124: و نؤمن بما جاء من كراماتهم (And we believe in what has been transmitted from the miracles of the saints).²⁹⁶ In his *‘Aja’ib al-Qalb*, al-Ghazali relates the amusing story of Ibrahim al-Raqqi (d. 326/938) who after being less than impressed with the recitation skills of the mystic Abu al-Khayr al-Tinani (d. 349/960), went to make his ablutions only to find a lion staring at him. Fleeing from the scene and informing Abu al-Khayr of the incident, the latter immediately chastised the lion for frightening his guest. Afterwards, Abu al-Khayr commented to Ibrahim, “You put a lot of stock in the outward (ظاهر), therefore you fear lions; we put a lot of stock in the inward (باطن), therefore lions fear us.”²⁹⁷ This is an example of a *karamah* that contains both an epistemological as well as a dynamological element.

There is also much indication in sacred text that there exists a Hierarchy (*Diwan*) of Saints (ديوان الاولياء) such as the “*hadith* of envy” (غبطة) in which the Prophet said that

²⁹⁴ ibid. The exact statement is also attributed to Ahmad al-Rifa’i (d. 578/1182).

²⁹⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Sharh ‘Aja’ib al-Qalb, The Marvels of the Heart*, 73.

²⁹⁶ Hamza Yusuf, *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi* (Berkeley: Sandala, 2007), 78.

²⁹⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Sharh ‘Aja’ib al-Qalb, The Marvels of the Heart*, 73.

on the Day of Resurrection, a group of servants will be “the envy of prophets and martyrs, sitting of thrones of light, and whose faces will shine... These are the *awliya* of God.”²⁹⁸ Or the much more specific “*hadith* of the three-hundred” related Abu Nu’aym in which the Prophet explains the dynamics of the *Diwan* if one of the *awliya* should die. He concludes the *hadith* saying, “Life and death, rain and vegetation, and protection from distress are possible (only) because of them.” Imam al-Suyuti in his *Al-Khabar al-Dal ‘ala Wujud al’Qutb wa al-Awtad wa al-Nujaba wa al-Abdal* puts their number at three-hundred seventy-five: three-hundred *nujaba*; forty *nuqaba*; thirty *abdal*; four *awtad*; and one *qutb*,²⁹⁹ the “pole” or “axis” upon which the universe turns; the most righteous man on earth who “safeguards the right of creation and the right of the Creator.”³⁰⁰ “the unique man of Muhammad” (الفرد المحمدي)³⁰¹ who actualizes in his every moment the *tawhid* of God - for if he did not, the heavens and the earth, that is to say, the universe would cease to exist.³⁰² Ibn ‘Ata Allah says, “Know that the heavens and the earth show proper etiquette before the saints, just as people do.”³⁰³

²⁹⁸ *Hadith* of Tirmidhi reported by Al-Raqashi (d. 120/738) from the inner circle of Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728).

²⁹⁹ Imam Muhammad b. Nasir al-Dari, *Al-Du’a al-Nasiri, The Prayer of the Oppressed*, translation and introduction by Hamza Yusuf, 101.

³⁰⁰ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 71.

³⁰¹ Muhammad b. al-Habib al-Amghari al-Idrisi, *Diwan Bughyati al-Muridin al-Sa’irin wa Tuhfatu al-Salikin al-‘Arifin* (Casablanca: Dar al-Rashad, 1432/2011), 6.

³⁰² A weak (ضعيف) yet oft-quoted *hadith* states: “The heavens and the earth are sustained by ‘Say: He is God, the Uniquely One (*Ahad*)’” (Q 112:1) (أسست السماوات السبع والأرضون السبع على قل هو الله أحد). Scholars of *hadith* commenting on this mention that as long as *one* person upon the earth believes in and actualizes the oneness of God, the heavens and the earth will remain intact. Interestingly, the rabbinical authorities of the Talmud, commenting on Deut. 6:4 (The *Shema*), say that if one were to change the *dalet* in *Echad* (One) to a *resh*, spelling *Achar*, (meaning “other”), “the earth would be destroyed.” The existence of the *Diwan* may also help explain the meaning of Christ’s enigmatic statement about his brother James in Λογιον 12 of the Gospel of Thomas, “Wherever you are, you are to go to James the Righteous (*Ya’kov al-Saddiq*) for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.” That is to say, James is the axis (*qutb*), the one who knows God as Jesus did – “the unique man of Christ” (الفرد المسيحي).

³⁰³ Λογιον 143. Quoted from: Sherman Jackson, *Sufism for Non-Sufis? Ibn ‘Ata Allah al-Sakandari’s Taj al-‘Arus*, 85.

Proximity to God

In the first level of union known as *qurb* (nearness or proximity), the aspirant adorns himself with God's attributes and character; he becomes a divine reflection of God's justice, mercy, love, and knowledge. Just as the Prophet is described by God as being *ra'uf* and *raheem* (9:128.9), two divine attributes but lacking the definite articles, so can the aspirant. In the *Mishkat* Ghazali quotes the *hadith*: "God created Adam in His own image," ³⁰⁴ خلق الله آدم على صورته, to demonstrate that the human being (الانسان) can know the reality of things. The "image of God" here is not anything material, it is rather the ability to reason. The essence of each species is that which is unique to it; what is unique to man is reason, so it must be his essential nature – his *differentia*. Modern human reductionists (like Richard Dawkins) claim that human beings are a species of "African apes," since our DNA is apparently ninety-eight percent identical with that of a chimpanzee. We might respond by saying that in the remaining two-percent lies human reason, volition, morality – a unique *intellectus* giving us the ability to choose right and wrong. Thus acquisition of knowledge is the purpose of our creation. But how does this relate to the verse: "I did not create jinn and man except to worship me," ما خلقت الجن و ³⁰⁵ الانس الا ليعبدون According to 'Abd Allah b. 'Abbas (d. 68/687), the founder of Qur'anic exegesis (مفسر القرآن), the final word in the verse, *li-ya'buduni* ("to worship me"), should be thought of as *li-ya'rifuni* ("to know me") because one cannot worship God adequately without knowledge; and that true episteme of God (*ma'rifat Allah*) will inevitably lead to His love (*mahabbah*). In other words, if one has knowledge of God, he will *necessarily*

³⁰⁴ خلق الله آدم على صورته. *Mishkat al-Anwar*, 1.12.21.

³⁰⁵ Q 51:56.

love Him. No human being surpassed the Prophet in his knowledge of God thus no one loved God more than he did. The Prophet perfected the worship (عبادة) and servitude (عبودية) of God and is thus the apex of God's creation, in fact, the reason for the creation itself: لو لآك ما خلقت الافلاك ("If you had not been, I would not have created the spheres");³⁰⁶ and God's statement to Adam, لو لا محمد ما خلقتك ("If it were not for Muhammad, I would not have created you").³⁰⁷ Imam Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi (d. 279/892) records no less than three times in his *Al-Shama'il al-Nabawiyya* that the Prophet "worshipped his Lord until his feet would swell" (حتى تنتفك قدماه). When questioned by his wife, his answer was, "Shall I not be a grateful servant," افلا اكون عبدا شكورا?³⁰⁸

Absorption in God

The second level of mystical union is called *istighraq* (immersion or absorption) by al-Ghazali and referred to as subjective *tawhid* (unification) by some Western scholars. At this stage, not only does the aspirant adorn himself with the character of God, but God becomes the only object of his concern, love, and contemplation – "immersed in singularity" (استغراق في فردانية).³⁰⁹ Ibn 'Ajibah called this "pure ecstasy" (*wujud*) and quoted a poetry verse of Junayd who said: "My ecstasy is to pass away from existence by what is shown me in contemplation of the divine" (وجودي أن أغيب عن الوجود).³¹⁰ Nothing remains as the content of his consciousness except the

³⁰⁶ There is weakness in this *hadith*.

³⁰⁷ *Hadith* of Bayhaqi and Hakim.

³⁰⁸ See: Imam Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Shama'il Tirmidhi*, translated by Muhammad b. 'Aburrahman Ebrahim (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2000), 260. Al-Tirmidhi relates a version of this *hadith* from Al-Mughirah b. Sha'bah and twice from Abu Hurayrah.

³⁰⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Mishkat al-Anwar* 1.45.16-17.

³¹⁰ Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa'iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 51-52.

Beloved. In this way, when Majnun would look at animals, mountains, other people, and even asked his own name, his answer was always, “Layla.” This state is intimated by the great Companion, beloved of God and His Messenger, and keeper of divine secrets Imam ‘Ali b. Abu Talib (d. 40/661) who once said, “I never see a thing without seeing God before it” (ما رايت شيء الا رايت الله قبله).³¹¹ Al-Ansari says about *istighraq: fataha ‘aynahu fi matali’ati al-azaliyya fatakhlasu min al-humum al-daniyya* (“He [the aspirant] has opened his eyes to observing eternity and has rid himself of lesser concerns.”)³¹² Evidence of the *Sahabah* (Prophetic Companions) having attained to this level of immersion in God’s love and intimacy is found in various stories attributed to them such as one of them having his leg amputated while in prayer to which he made no sound, or another, ‘Ebad b. Bishr, who kept plucking out arrows from his body as he stood in worship. Al-Ghazali mentions in the *Munqidh* that the bedouin used to say, before the prophetic commencement (بعثة): “Muhammad has passionate love for his Lord!” when the Prophet would retire to the cave of Hira’ for devotional practices (*tahannuth*; Heb: *tekhinnoth*), introspection (محاسبة), and solitude (مراقبة).³¹³ In fact one of the meanings of *dhalal* (ضلال), usually translated as “error,” is to be “enamored,” hence, “(Did not your Lord) find (*wajadaka*)³¹⁴ you in mad-love (*dhalan*), then He gave you direction (in the form of sacred law)” (Q 93:7)?

Annihilation in God: the final stage of “the journey to Allah”

³¹¹ *ibid*, 23. Most of the initiatic chains (*silsilat*) of the various Sufi orders go directly back to either ‘Ali or Abu Bakr.

³¹² Al-Ansari, *Stations of the Wayfarers*, 195.

³¹³ Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error*. Trans. by Richard J. McCarthy (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2000), 45

³¹⁴ Related to *wujud* (وجود).

Ibn ‘Ata Allah says, “Do not pass from created reality to created reality, as if you were a donkey rotating around a millstone. He walks, and the very thing which he passes is the thing to which he passes. Rather, pass from created reality to the Creator: ‘Verily your Lord is the *terminus ad quem*’” (Q 53:42).³¹⁵ The final level of mystical union known as *fana’* (annihilation, passing away, or objective *tawhid*) is an “ocean that has no end;”³¹⁶ it is “sailing the sea of union” (راكبا بحر الجمع) and “proceeding along the path of subsistence” (سالكا سبيل البقاء).³¹⁷ Al-Ghazali refers to this level as “total annihilation” (فناء كل) or “annihilation in the True One” (الفناء في الواحد الحق). Al-Hujwiri describes it as being “pure from all existing things.”³¹⁸ To speak of annihilation is to speak inadequately. It represents the movement from practical Sufism to the actualization and experience of God; from the “journey to Allah” to the “journey in Allah.” The aspirant comes to realize that God is the only “Real,” the only non-contingent Being (الواجب الوجود) whose non-existence (عدم) is impossible: (‘Hence the Real Existent is God’).³¹⁹ This is not to say that man has no reality – “*Cogito ergo sum*” as Descartes said - but only that his reality and existence is wholly derived, dependent, and impoverished (فقير) in relation to Him. The aspirant tastes the meanings of the creedal formula لا حول و لا قوة الا بالله (There is neither strength nor power except by means of God), and comes to know that لا فاعل الا الله (“There is no Real Agent [Doer] save God”);³²⁰ insights seemingly

³¹⁵ Λογιον 245. Quoted from: Sherman Jackson, *Sufism for Non-Sufis? Ibn ‘Ata Allah al-Sakandari’s Taj al-‘Arus*, 114.

³¹⁶ Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 126.

³¹⁷ Al-Ansari, *Stations of the Wayfarers*, 223.

³¹⁸ This is Hermansen’s translation. See: Marcia Hermansen, “Fana’ fi al-Rasul: The Utmost Degree of Devotion to the Prophet Muhammad,” in *Sufi Illuminations: A Journal Devoted to the Study of Islam and Sufism*, Vol. 4 No. 1 Spring 2008, chief ed. Redzic, 72. Cf. al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, trans. R.A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1976), 245.

³¹⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, 1.41.9-10.

³²⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Sharh ‘Aja’ib al-Qalb, The Marvels of the Heart*, xxxii.

attained even by the pre-Islamic poet Labid who once uttered what the Prophet called “the truest word (اصدق القول) a poet has even spoken:” (ما خلا الله باطل “Indeed all things are false save God”).

The necessary existence and non-contingency of God is intimated in the verse, “All things upon (the earth) will perish (*fan*, فان); but there will remain (*yabqa*, يبقى) the Countenance of thy Lord, Possessor of Majesty and Honor” (Q 55:26-27). In the same vein, Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq noticed something quite remarkable in the Qur’anic story of Moses at the burning bush. In all three versions of the story (Q 20:12; 27:9; 28:30), God identifies Himself to Moses by repeating the independent pronoun “*Ana*” (انا), meaning “I am.” This duplication also found in the biblical version of the story in Exodus 3:14 (Heb: *Ehye asher Ehye* (אהיה אשר אהיה); Gr: Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν; “I am who I am [He who is, *Qui est*]”), points to God’s existential attribute of Being (*al-Wujud*) according to the Imam as well as denotes a denial of “any definable essence or quiddity of the divine.”³²¹ One could make the argument that the Name (*Ha Shem*, השם) of God in the Tanakh, represented by the four Hebrew letters – *yod*, *he* *waw*, *he* – and read as *Adonai* (Lord) by many Jews is simply the present tense verb *yihweh* (יהוה), meaning “He is,” from the lexical form *hawah* (*he*, *waw*, *he* [יהוה]). The prominence of the letter *he*, pronounced *ha* in Arabic, is also discussed by the theosophist Ibn al- ‘Arabi who called the divine essence *Hahut* (هاهوت) after “experiencing a vision of the divine essence is the shape of the word *hu*,”³²² meaning “He (is).” It was not uncommon a few years ago in the Muslim world to hear the dervishes cry out, *Ya Hu! Ya Hu!* (“O He! O He!”) while they prowled

³²¹ Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996), 78.

³²² Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 270.

the streets at night. According to *The Study Qur'an*, “*Huwa* would thus be the greatest Name of God (*al-ism al-a'zam*; Ts), and one of the most effective formulas for calling upon Divine aid would be *ya huwa ya man la huwa illa huwa*, ‘O He. O the One other than whom there is no He’ (Ts), or ‘O He. O the One Who is He, other than Whom there is no god’ (Al).”³²³

At *fana*,’ the aspirant experiences the reality of the mystical unitive state with a flash of insight so piercing that he may even lose control of his speech, uttering the heretical ostensibly in the process of inadequate articulation. This phenomenon known as *shathiyya* (theopathic locutions),³²⁴ may even cause the mystic to come into conflict with uninitiated legal authorities who cannot help but to charge him with blasphemy (كفر).

Thus Al-Ghazali warns the aspirant, as does Junayd before him, that any attempt to articulate the reality of mystical union will more often than not resemble blasphemous speech in its apparent (*thahiri*) aspect. One may think of the “two knowledges” *hadith* of Abu Hurayrah or the “three things” *logion* of the Gospel of Thomas.³²⁵ This may be why Junayd quite often wrote about spiritual matters by employing the cryptic use of *insharah*

³²³ *The Study Qur'an*, p. 1579, Q 112:1; “Ts” is al-Tabrisi (*Majma' al-Bayan*) and “Al” is al-Alusi (*Ruh al-Ma'ani*).

³²⁴ This is Schimmel’s translation. See: Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 43.

³²⁵ These are respectively: “I (Abu Hurayrah) have memorized two kinds of knowledge from Allah’s Apostle. I have propagated one of them to you, and if I propagated the second, then my pharynx would be cut” (*Hadith* of Bukhari); “Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Compare me to someone and tell me whom I am like.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘You are like a righteous angel.’ Matthew said to him, ‘You are like a wise philosopher.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Master, my mouth is wholly incapable of saying whom you are like.’ Jesus said, ‘I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring which I have measured out.’ And he took him and withdrew and told him three things. When Thomas returned to his companions, they asked him, ‘What did Jesus say to you?’ Thomas said to them, ‘If I tell you one of the things which he told me, you will pick up stones and throw them at me; a fire will come out of the stones and burn you up’” (Λογιον 13, Gospel of Thomas). See: John W. Coakley & Andrea Sterk, *Readings in World Christian History, Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (New York: Orbis, 2004), 5-12.

(similitude or parable).³²⁶ Al-Ghazali says, “One intimately possesses by this state ought not to go beyond saying, ‘There was what was of what I do not mention; so think well of it and ask for no account.’”³²⁷ But even though ‘Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani (d. 525/1131) defended his doctrine of *fana*’ as being non-pantheistic, he was nonetheless executed by state authorities at age thirty-three.³²⁸

These attempted ecstatic articulations of God’s love (محبة/*caritas*/αγάπη: unconditional love between unequal principals³²⁹) are provoked by actualizations or tastings of one’s faith through theopanies and unveilings (مكاشفات). Such tastings of divine intimacy (أنس) produce feelings of extreme longing (شوق) in the heart of the aspirant for his Beloved. Hence while we are commanded by the Prophet to not wish for death, the mystic is not at all bothered by its presence as it provides him the opportunity to return to

³²⁶ For instance Muhammad b. al-Habib al-Amghari al-Idrisi quotes Junayd in his *Diwan*: “Purify yourself with the waters of the unseen if you possess a secret; (if not) make *tayammum* (dry ablutions) by means of the highland or the stone; pass in front of the Imam if you are standing in front of him; And pray the forenoon prayer (*Dhuhr*) and the beginning of the afternoon (‘*Asr*’); for this is the prayer of the Gnostics (*al-‘Arifin*), those who know their Lord; and if you are from them, then sprinkle the earth with the sea.”

³²⁷ Cited from: *Al-Ghazali, Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh min al-Dalal)*, trans. by Richard J. McCarthy, S.J. (Boston: Twayne, 1980), Sect. 96, pg. 21.

³²⁸ Qamar-ul Huda, “The Remembrance of the Prophet (pbuh) in Suhrawardi’s Awarif al-Ma’arif” in *Sufi Illuminations: A Journal Devoted to the Study of Islam and Sufism*, Vol. 4 No. 1 Spring 2008, chief ed. Redzic, 20. Qamar-ul Huda notes: “For a translation of ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s work, see ‘Apologia’ in A.J. Arberry’s *A Sufi Martyr* (London, 1969).”

³²⁹ While Aristotle deistically maintained that true love between God and man was impossible due to the fact that they do not share a “genus,” and that there exists an “infinite qualitative difference” (to use Kierkegaard’s famous phrase) between the two, St. Thomas Aquinas and Imam al-Ghazali appeal to God’s demonstration of love by means of incarnation for the former and prophecy for the latter thus bridging the gap between the divine and human. It is interesting to note that Plato ended the Republic with the “Myth or Er” in Book X which some classicists have contended may have been either a later addition by Plato or a later addition by a pseudonymous Platonic disciple. The author has Platonic Socrates conclude to his interlocutor Glaucon: «Αλλ’ αν εμοι πειθωμεθα, νομιζοντες αθανατον ψυχην και δυνατην παντα μεν κακα ανεχεσθαι, παντα δε αγαθα, της ανω οδου αει εξομεθα και δικαιοσυνην μετα φρονησεως παντι τροπω επιτηδευσομεν, ινα και ημιν αυτοις φιλοι ωμεν και τοις θεοις, αυτου τε μενοντες ενθαδε, και επειδαν τα αθλα αυτης κοιζωμεθα» (“But if we are persuaded by me, realizing that the soul is immortal and, on the one hand, able to endure all evil things, and, on the other hand, all good things, we will always have the upward road. And justice with prudence we will pursue in every way (of life), so that we might be both *friends* to ourselves and *to the gods*, both while remaining here, and whenever we receive the rewards of it (justice)” (translation and emphasis are mine [621c]). Also see: Plato. *The Republic; Books VI-X*, translated by Paul Shorey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 518-520.

his Beloved as the Prophet said, “Death is the gift of the believer.”³³⁰ We can never forget the astonishing chant of “the martyr of divine love” al-Husayn b. al-Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 309/922) as Abbasid legal authorities led him towards his brutal execution: اقتلونني يا ثقاتي (‘Kill me O my friends! Indeed, my death is my life!’). Al-Hallaj’s famous alleged verbal trespass: انا الحق (‘I am the Truth!’), although there is much speculation about it,³³¹ was not the real problem for the Sufis, but rather that he divulged a mystical secret (سر) while in a state of rapturous love (عشق), ecstasy (وجد), and stupefaction (دهشة); a secret that should not have been articulated.³³² Eulogized by both ‘Attar (d. 617/1220) and Rumi (d. 671/1273), al-Hallaj became both a symbol for “suffering love and unitive experience.”³³³ Perhaps the most striking of all Hallajian “I am statements” is, “I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I!” (انا من اهوى و من اهوى انا).³³⁴

For Junayd, *fana’*, that is, the passing away or “dissolution of self-consciousness”³³⁵ was absolutely necessary in order to experience real mystical union (*jama’*) with God. For other Sufis of Baghdad, such as Nuri (d. 286/899) and Kharraz, (d. 295/908) *fana’* represents the highest level of intimacy with the Divine, when the “lower

³³⁰ تحفة المؤمن الموت (Hadith of Imam al-Bayhaqi [Shu’ab al-Iman]). Many Muslims find themselves unnecessarily bothered by a sound *hadith* found in Bukhari in which ‘A’isha relates that the Prophet was contemplating suicide during the break (*fatrah*) in the Revelation in the early Meccan period. This *hadith* can be understood properly through Sufi conceptions of longing (*shawq*) and intimacy (*uns*). See: Al-Ghazali, *Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment. Kitab al-Mahabba wa’l-Shawq wa’l-Uns wa’l-Rida*. Trans. by Eric Ormsby (London, Islamic Texts Society, 1997).

³³¹ Scholars mention the anecdotal story of Al-Hallaj knocking at the door of Junayd and identifying himself by saying, “*Ana al-Haqq*.” Karamustafa considers the story inaccurate and anachronistic (See: Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Years*, 26). Theories abound as to who Al-Hallaj actually was: a secret Christian, a seditionist Shiite, a tax reformer (according to Schimmel), a cunning sorcerer, a great saint of God (according to ‘Attar & Rumi), possibly a combination? See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 66.

³³² Spinoza once commented that God’s nature resembles our words about as much as the Dogstar (Sirius) resembles a dog.

³³³ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 64.

³³⁴ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 59.

³³⁵ Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Years*, 16.

self and its lustful desires are annihilated in that which Allah loves, wishes, and commands”³³⁶ so that, according to Al-Ghazali, لم يبق الا الواحد الحق (“nothing remains save the One, the Real”).³³⁷ The aspirant, having now attained rank and friendship (*wilayah* or *khullah*, *amicitia*, *philia*)³³⁸ with his Lord, becomes one with Him. One of the earliest articulators of Sufi “doctrine,” Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 380s/990s) said in his *At-Ta’arruf li Madhhab al-Tasawwuf*, “Annihilation means that the servant becomes extinct to all interests and (personal) preference departs from him.”³³⁹ In the *Mu’jam Mustahalat As-Sufiyya* we read that “Annihilation is the replacement of human attributes by the Divine attributes, so that a man becomes such that ‘the Truth is his hearing and his sight,’ as stated in the Prophetic tradition.”³⁴⁰ This is the esoteric import of Genesis 5:24 according to Rabbi Judah Ha Levi (d. 535/1141): “And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him (elevated him)” (וַיִּתְּהַלֵּךְ עֲנוֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֵינֶנּוּ כִּי־לָקַח אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים); that is to say, Enoch walked “as if” God,³⁴¹ because Enoch (his ego-self) was gone, and God elevated his rank. Interestingly, in his chapter about the Prophet Enoch (Idris) in the *Fusus al-Hikam*, Ibn al- ‘Arabi quotes the verse, “You are the *elevated* ones, and God is *with you*” (Q 47:35).³⁴² God’s *ma’iyya* (nearness) to His creation is also indicated by al-

³³⁶ Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 71.

³³⁷ Al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights*, 52.

³³⁸ According to Aquinas, the most complete actualization of love (*amor*) is friendship (*amicitia*), in which there is not only mutual mercy and benevolence between the two parties, but there is also an eagerness and desire to do good for each other. He cites: “I no longer call you servants (δούλους)...but friends (φίλους)...” (John 15:15.1). Interestingly, Aquinas’ conception of love and friendship is echoed by Al-Ghazali: “When friendship becomes stronger it becomes brotherhood, when it increases, it becomes, in turn, ‘true love,’ and finally it becomes bosom-friendship (*khullah*), which is a relationship between man and God” (emphasis mine). See: Mohamed Ahmed Sherif. *Ghazali’s Theory of Virtue*, 99.

³³⁹ Quoted from: Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 132.

³⁴⁰ *ibid*, 134.

³⁴¹ Exodus 7:1 reads: *N’thati-ka elohim l’par’oh v’aharon akhi-ka yihyeh n’vi’e’ka* (“I have made you a god unto Pharaoh and Aaron your brother will be as your prophet”).

³⁴² Muhyiddin Ibn Al- ‘Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, translated by R.W.J. Austin (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 84.

Ghazali who says, “God is with all things, as light is with the things” (ان الله مع كل شيء)³⁴³ (كالنور مع الاشياء).

As stated earlier, Islamic orthodoxy has always maintained that nothing and no one shares in God’s essence (ذات), attributes (صفات), and actions (افعال). Contemporary scholar Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller writes, “(We) cannot be identified with His entity or attributes but only with His actions and rulings: the world, as it were, is pure act, while Allah is pure Being... This is what is meant by the Sufi term *Wahdat al-Wujud* or Oneness of Being.”³⁴⁴ God will sanctify a chosen few whom we call saints (*awliya*), or as Junayd refers to them: صفوة من العباد (“the choicest of the servants”), protect them from sin, and designate them as His agents upon the earth. When they act, it is “as if” (*ka-anna*: to use the terminology of Ibn al-‘Arabi) God is acting. The concept of “as if” is denoted by al-Ansari when he begins his chapter on union (باب الجمع) by quoting the Qur’anic *ayah* (quoted earlier): “And you threw not (O Muhammad), when you threw (the stones), but it was God who threw: ما رميت اذ رميت ولكن الله رمى و (Q 8:17.1).”³⁴⁵ Al-Ansari ends the chapter by stating: الجمع غاية مقامات السالكين و هو طرف بحر التوحيد (“Union is the ultimate station for the Wayfarers and it is the side of the Sea of Unification”).³⁴⁶

Junayd believes that this exalted state of union is described by God when he quotes the famous *hadith qudsi* (extra-Qur’anic divine utterance) in which God says through His chosen vessel Muhammad:

My servant draws near unto Me by means of nothing more dear to Me than his obligatory actions. Then he continues to draw near unto Me with his supererogatory actions until I love him. And when I love him, I become his ear by which he hears, his eye with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and

³⁴³ *Mishkat al-Anwar*, 1.66.2.

³⁴⁴ Nuh Ha Mim Keller, *Sea Without Shore: A Manual of the Sufi Path* (Beltsville: Amana, 2011), 149.

³⁴⁵ Al-Ansari, *Stations of the Wayfarers*, 233.

³⁴⁶ *ibid*, 234.

his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask something of Me, I would surely give it to him.³⁴⁷

Commenting on the above *hadith*, Emir ‘Abd Qadir al-Jaza’iri (d. 1300/1883) says in *Al-Mawaqif*: “In other words, the identity of the Real is revealed to him as the secret of his own outward and inward faculties.”³⁴⁸

Shaykh Amin ‘ala al-Din al-Naqshbandi says that there are two kinds of annihilation;³⁴⁹ the first kind is achieved through rigorous struggle in the mystical path in which the aspirant will pass through various stations (مقامات) and states (احوال)³⁵⁰ in order to arrive at union with God and selfless absorption in Him. Junayd seems to refer to this long painful ego-shattering process as *bala*, or trial, in his *Kitab al-Fana*.³⁵¹ The second type is a divine gift bestowed upon an aspirant simply because God loves him. In this sense, we can say that *fana*, ‘like knowledge itself, is either *kasbiy* (earned) or *wahbiy* (granted); although all things are *wahbiy* in reality as God is the Ultimate Cause of everything. Sufi poets such as Abu Nuwas and Ibn al-Faid often times compare *fana*’ with being in a drunken stupor (سكر) - intoxicated with the wine (خمر) of God’s love and intimacy (أنس). Like the drunkard who is “not held responsible for his delirious raving,” the mystic may utter a statement that clearly contravenes the sacred law. “As a matter of fact, these ecstatic utterances are a metaphorical expression of what they experience in

³⁴⁷ *Hadith* of Bukhari.

³⁴⁸ Quoted from: Imam Muhammad b. Nasir al-Dari, ‘*Al-Du’a al-Nasiri, The Prayer of the Oppressed*, translation and introduction by Hamza Yusuf, 37.

³⁴⁹ Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 127.

³⁵⁰ Once a station (*maqam*) is earned, the aspirant is firmly established upon it unless he sins, while a state (*hal*) is a bestowal of a mystical gift that comes and goes. Mayer defines *hal* as “a rapture or transitional spiritual state” and *maqam* as “a stable station.” According to Mayer, these concepts may have had their origins in Hasan al-Basri (d. 728). See: Toby Mayer, “Theology and Sufism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 260.

³⁵¹ The Sufis often relate a story of Abu Yazid who was once asked “Where is Abu Yazid?” Abu Yazid responded, “Who is Abu Yazid? I am also in search of him.” Having been drowned in God’s remembrance, Abu Yazid’s ego had fallen out of his consciousness.

the form of mystic disclosure and they return to their normal rectitude after the disappearance of this state.”³⁵² These utterances reflect the most profound truths actualized by the mystics in their state of annihilation – *in vino veritas*.³⁵³ According to Winston, such states of God-intoxication are “superior to [discursive] reasoning” (κρείττον λόγου) according to Philo, and “take shape not through human design but through God-inspired frenzy” (ενθεω μανια).³⁵⁴ Philo takes pains to emphasize that the “divine intoxication is more sober than sobriety itself” (νηφαλεωτερα νηψεως αυτης).³⁵⁵

Orthodox Egyptian theologian and Hanafite jurist Imam al-Sha’rani (d. 973/1565) legitimized the theopathic utterances of both al-Bistami and Ibn al-‘Arabi explaining that due to their complete immersion in God’s remembrance, they became anesthetized to all else.³⁵⁶ They attempted to describe what al-Ansari called “the third level of love,” that is, a love that “captivates and takes the breath away” (محبة خاطفة تقطع العبارة).³⁵⁷ Al-Ghazali says, “They become intoxicated with such an intoxication (سكروا سكرًا) that the ruling authority of their rational faculty (سلطان عقولهم) was overthrown. Hence one of them says انا الحق (“I am the Truth!”), another, سبحاني ما اعظم شئني (“Glory be to me, how great is my affair!”), and still another, ما في جبتي الا الله (“There is nothing in my robe but God!”).”³⁵⁸

The first statement was supposedly uttered by al-Hallaj as previously stated, while the

³⁵² Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 42.

³⁵³ “In wine there is truth.”

³⁵⁴ Winston, “Philo’s Mysticism,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. VIII, ed. David T. Runia, 75; Cf. Plato *Phaedrus* 244d4.

³⁵⁵ *Leg.* 3.82

³⁵⁶ Theologians also cite a sound narration in Bukhari in which the Prophet compared the joy God experiences (in no anthropomorphic way) when a sinner reorients himself towards Him to a man who lost his conveyance in the desert thinking himself doomed only to discover his conveyance at the last moment then shouting towards the heavens, يا الله انت عبي و انا ربك (“O God! You are my servant, and I am your Lord!”). The man was in such a state of ecstasy that he lost control of his speech, uttering the blasphemous in an attempt to express his inexpressible joy.

³⁵⁷ Al-Ansari, *Stations of the Wayfarers*, 165.

³⁵⁸ *Mishkat al-Anwar*, 1.45.20.

latter two are attributed to Abu Yazid al-Bistami. Ibn ‘Ajibah also reports that al-Shushtari once exclaimed: (أنا المحب والحبيب ما ثم ثاني) “I am the Lover and the Beloved. No second one is there.”³⁵⁹ These love-crazed utterances are understandable only from the exalted vista of mystical union “in which the deity hears, sees, walks, touches, and speaks through the emptied faculties of the Sufi whose ego-self has been annihilated.”³⁶⁰ Al-Ghazali defends these men of *’ishq* (intimate or passionate love) by stating that they experienced not the “reality of unification” (حقيقة الاتحاد) but rather a “semblance” or “likeness” of it (شبه الاتحاد). However, most mysteries should not/could not be articulated; says Ghazali: “The hearts of the free lovers are graveyards of mysteries.”³⁶¹

To use the controversial analogy of erotic human love, when the bride and her beloved bridegroom are joined in sexual union (جماع), dualism seems to fade away in their euphoria such that it feels *as if* (كأن) they are “one flesh” (אֶחָד בֶּשָׂר, Gen. 2:24). Similarly, when the love-struck (عاشق) Sufi and his Beloved are joined in mystical union (جمع), dualism falls away and a semblance of unification is experienced; it feels *as if* they are one and the same, however al-Ghazali is unequivocal when he says that there is a huge difference between saying “the wine is the cup” (الخمير قدح) and “it is *as if* the wine is the cup” (كأنه قدح).³⁶² It feels like one but it is *really* two.

This theme is explicitly explored by the likes of Maimonides (d. 601/1204) in his *Moreh Ha Nevukhim (Dalala al-Ha’irin)* vis-à-vis the archetypal Layla and Majnun “*ghazal*” or “*munajjad*” of the שיר השירים (Song of Songs). The great medieval Jewish

³⁵⁹ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 59.

³⁶⁰ Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings*, 69.

³⁶¹ صدور الأحرار قيور الأسرار (Mishkat al-Anwar, Muqaddimah 5)

³⁶² Mishkat al-Anwar, 1.47.13.

philosopher, theologian, polymath, and product of Muslim Spain also draws an important distinction between general love (אהבה [mahabbah]) and passionate love (השק [ishq]);³⁶³ a distinction that landed Nuri in legalistic hot water centuries earlier in Baghdad. Rabbi Louis Jacobs says that for Maimonides, *devekut*, or “cleaving to God,” “involves being with Him in thought at all times and in constant communion with Him.”³⁶⁴ Junayd begins his *Kitab al-Fana*’ saying, “Praise be to God, who cut off attachments from those who cut themselves off for Him, who granted the realities to those who *cling* (المتصلين اليه) to Him and rely upon Him by founding them (اوجدهم) and granting them His love” (emphasis mine).³⁶⁵

The Day of the Covenant

Absolutely central to Junayd’s concept of mystical union is this idea of returning to one’s origin (*ta’wil*).³⁶⁶ Mystical union involves an experience reminiscent of that great meta-historical Day of the Covenant (يوم الست) in which God asked all of us, “Am I not your Lord?” (الست بربكم) - To which we answered, “Yes!” (*Bala!*). Schimmel says, “This is the state of the primordial covenant (Q 7:172), when God was alone and what is

³⁶³ Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (Springfield: Behrman House, Inc., 1973), 161.

³⁶⁴ *ibid*, 157. Jacobs says on pg. 157-158: “Nahmanides (Commentary to Deut. 11:22) writes: ‘It is possible that included in the idea of ‘attachment’ is that you should always keep God and His love in mind, never separating your thoughts from Him when you walk in His way, when you lie down and when you rise up, to the extent that a man’s conversation with others should only be verbal, his heart not being with them but with God.’ Such a man, remarks Nahmanides (without quoting Bahya) is in Heaven even while walking this earth and he refers to Judah Ha Levi: *Kurazi*, III, I, who quotes in this connection: ‘And Enoch walked with God’ (Gen 5:24).”

³⁶⁵ Quoted from and translated by Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings*, 259.

³⁶⁶ *Ta’wil* is also the term used by some scholars to denote mystical exegesis, as opposed to *tafsir* which attempts to elucidate legalistic Qur’anic passages (*muhkamat*). This distinction has some parallels with *midrash haggadah* and *midrash halakhah* in classical Judaism. Some of the most noteworthy mystical exegetes of Islam were: Ibn ‘Abbas, Ja’far al-Sadiq, Al-Muhasibi, Al-Tustari, Al-Suhrawardi, and Ibn ‘Ajibah.

created in time was not yet existent. Only then can man realize perfect *tawhid*; only then can he witness that God is one from eternity to eternity.”³⁶⁷ Junayd claims in *Kitab al-Fana* that it is the “most perfect existence and the most realized.”³⁶⁸ Karamustafa says, “This primordial covenant marked the true and perfect type of human existence as selfless existence in God, presumably as non-individualized entities in *God’s mind*” (emphasis mine).³⁶⁹ Our pre-somatic “memories” of the covenant compel our souls into union with God (once again) in order to re-enact that day in which we were annihilated in God and basking in His glory, as Jesus Christ said according to John 17:5, “And now glorify me, O Father, with Yourself ; with the glory I had with You *before the world was*” (πρὸ τοῦ τοῦ κόσμου εἶναι). For Junayd, this is reaching the state in which the human being “was before he was.”³⁷⁰

Perpetuity: the first stage in “the journey in Allah”

While annihilation may be short, like flashes of intense sunlight, the subsequent state known as perpetuity (بقاء) may be long-lasting. In this state, the mystic “sobers up” (صحو) and “returns to his senses.” According to Junayd, “contemplation is once more restored to him so that he can put everything in its place and assess it correctly.”³⁷¹ Junayd considered this “reconstituted self... recomposed in the image of God after being thoroughly deconstructed during the Sufi journey”³⁷² to be the greatest of all human achievements. Nishapurian scholar Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 465/1072) writes in his

³⁶⁷ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 58.

³⁶⁸ Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings*, 260.

³⁶⁹ Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Years*, 17.

³⁷⁰ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 58.

³⁷¹ Quoted from: Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Years*, 17.

³⁷² *ibid*, 19.

Al-Risala (The Epistle), “When he has become extinct to his worldly desire, he survives in perpetuity through the truthfulness of his penitent reversion (انابة).”³⁷³ He continues, “Annihilation is the shedding of blameworthy qualities, while perpetuity is the maintenance of praiseworthy qualities.”³⁷⁴ According to Junayd, “Once more he assumes his individual attributes, after *fana*.’ His personal qualities persist in him and his actions in this world; when he has reached the zenith of spiritual achievement vouchsafed by God, *he becomes a pattern for his fellow men*” (emphasis mine).³⁷⁵ He is a true guide, transformed in God’s obedience (طاعة) – “A new life in God.”³⁷⁶ He remains of the genus of humanity yet he represents the best of humanity and has actualized the limit of man’s potential; he is Muhammadan in this respect as Hassan b. Thabit once said: “Muhammad is a man but he is not like other men; he is a ruby while others are mere stones” (محمد بشر (و ليس كالبشر و هو ياقوتة و الناس كالحجر)³⁷⁷ Shaykh Amin ‘ala al-Din al-Naqshbandi says, “The meaning of annihilation and perpetuity is implicit in the negation and affirmation of, “There is no god but Allah” (لا اله الا الله). That is because the expression “There is no god” (لا اله) annihilates the worship of anything, while the expression “but Allah” (الا الله) signifies the perpetuity of worship for Allah alone.”³⁷⁸

Although various hagiographies bear witness to the fact that some of early Sufis engaged in hermetic seclusion, itinerant mendicancy, and even self-mortification, these practices were generally done for short periods of time. The aim was to shock the *naqfs*

³⁷³ Quoted from: Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 128.

³⁷⁴ *ibid*, 133.

³⁷⁵ Quoted from: Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Years*, 17.

³⁷⁶ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 59.

³⁷⁷ (محمد بشر و ليس كالبشر و هو ياقوتة و الناس كالحجر) *Muhammadun basharun wa laysa ka al-bashari; wa huwa yaqutatun wa al-nasu ka al-hajari*.

³⁷⁸ Al-Naqshbandi, *Sufism: A Wayfarer’s Guide to the Naqshbandi Way*, 134.

out of its complacency for disciplinary purposes (رياضة), and “not to establish a rule of life.”³⁷⁹ Islam agrees with the Aristotelian notion that man is by nature a social creature, thus the mystic, having now entered into a state of “perpetuity after annihilation” (البقاء بعد الفناء), must return to society (the *polis*) and act as a guide for his fellow seekers.

Unlike the Hindu *Sannyasins* or Theravadian *Arhats* who after achieving *moksha/nirvana* remain utterly cut off from the world like “wild geese,” the Sufis in *baqa*’ according to Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1034/1635),³⁸⁰ resembling rather the Jain *Tirthankaras* or the *Boddhisattvas* of Mahayanan Buddhism,³⁸¹ selflessly assist the rest of humanity in *their* achievement of mystical union with their Lord. This selflessness or altruism is known as *ithar* (إيثار). The greatest of these altruists was the Prophet himself who returned to his persecuted followers in Mecca after journeying beyond the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary (سدرة المنتهى) at which time God revealed to him “what He revealed” (Q 53:10) – secrets between lovers - and saw of the “Signs of his Lord, the greatest” (53:18). One may also think of al-Ghazali returning to his family and students after a ten-year long sojourn in (499/1106) in which “ineffable mysteries were disclosed” to him. According to Philo, when Moses returned from Sinai after beholding the Existent, his divinized mind

³⁷⁹ Al-Ghazali, *On Disciplining the Soul and Breaking the Two Desires. Kitab Riyaday al-Nafs and Kitab Kasr al-Shahwatayn*. Trans. by T.J. Winter, XLV.

³⁸⁰ Marcia Hermansen, “Fana’ fi al-Rasul: The Utmost Degree of Devotion to the Prophet Muhammad,” in *Sufi Illuminations: A Journal Devoted to the Study of Islam and Sufism*, Vol. 4 No. 1 Spring 2008, chief ed. Redzic, 73. Cf. Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1971).

³⁸¹ Huston Smith illustrates the difference between the *Arhats* and *Boddhisattvas* of Buddhism in the story of the four men who, “journeying across an immense desert, come upon a compound surrounded with high walls. One of the four determines to find out what is inside. He scales the wall, and on reaching the top gives a whoop of delight and jumps over. The second and third do likewise. When the fourth man gets to the top of the wall, he sees below him an enchanted garden with sparkling streams, pleasant groves, and luscious fruit. Though longing to jump over, he resists the temptation. Remembering other wayfarers who are trudging the burning deserts, he climbs back down and devotes himself to directing them to the oasis. The first three men were *Arhats*; the last was a *Boddhisattva*, one who vows not to desert this world ‘until the grass itself be enlightened.’” See: Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions* (New York: Harper One, 1958), 124.

(*nous*), now transformed, continued to lead the Israelites down the path of virtue.³⁸²

Muslims also believe in the return (*Parousia*) of Christ, the epitome of selflessness, who was “raised unto Him” (Q 4:158) and will appear near the Eschaton to rectify the “People of the Book” (Q 4:159) and defeat the dark forces of the Anti-Christ (المسيح الدجال).³⁸³

The “Holy House” of Muhammad

Imam al-Kattani mentions in his *Forty* (الأربعين) that the Prophet said: “The foundation of Islam is the love of me and the love of my family” (اساس الاسلام حبي وحب اهل). Thus love of the Prophet’s “*Ahl al-Bayt*” (اهل البيت) and adherence to its members is not only incumbent upon all Muslims but also represents the essence of Islamic spirituality (تصوف). In fact, such an eminent Sunni authority as al-Shafi’i even considered benedictions upon the Prophet and his family (الصلاة على النبي وعلى اله) a vital pillar (ركن) of the daily canonical prayers (صلوات), prompting the civic authorities of his day to charge the Imam with having Rafidi (Shiite) tendencies. Al-Shafi’i said: “O People of the Holy Prophetic House! Your love is obligatory upon us according to the Qur’an. Whoever does not bless you (in prayer), (then) there is no prayer for him!” (يا اهل بيت). The *ayah* that al-Shafi’i has in mind, Q 42:23, says: “Say (O Muhammad): No reward do I ask of you for this (message), except that you love the *Family* (القريب).” According to Ibn ‘Abbas, the members of the “Family” in this *ayah* are Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn - also known as

³⁸² David Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 18.

³⁸³ Imam Abu Ja’far al-Tahawi (d. 321/933) writes in his famous Creed: “We believe in the portents of the Eschaton, which include the appearance of the Anti-Christ (*khuruj al-Dajjal*) as well as the descent of Jesus (*nuzul ‘Isa*), the son of Mary (upon whom be peace), from the heavens” (Λογιον 125). See: Hamza Yusuf, *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi*. For Muslim Eschatology see: Marcia Hermansen, “Eschatology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 308-324.

the *Itrah* (عترة) or “People of the Cloak” (أهل الكيسى) according to various other *ahadith*. The incumbency of loving the Prophet’s family is also intimated in several *ahadith*, most famously: “Love God for His blessings upon you; love me for the sake of God; and love the People of my House for the sake of me” (أحبوا الله لما يغذوكم به من نعمه, وأحبوني لحب الله,)³⁸⁴ “Teach your children three principles: love of your Prophet; love of the People of his House; the (proper) recitation of the Qur’an” (أدبوا أولادكم على ثلاث خصال,)³⁸⁵ In another *ayah* we read: “... God only wants to remove all stains from you, O People of the House, and to render you pure and spotless” [Q 33:33.9] (إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا). Al-Kattani interprets the word “*rijs*” (رجس) (lit. “stain”) as “*ithm*” (إثم) (sin). It is the well-pleasing (preferential) will of God that the members of the Holy House attain to the rank of sainthood and intimate friendship (ولاية) with Allah and that they be sanctified/divinized with lordly (رباني) qualities and protected from sin. In yet another *ayah*, we read: “Clutch tightly to the Rope of God, all of you, and do not become sectarians” (Q 3:103.1). According to al-Tha’labi, Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq once commented about this *ayah*: “We are the Rope of God” (نحن حبل الله), meaning the Imams of *Ahl al-Bayt*; all Muslims must clutch, or to use the terminology of mystical Judaism, “cleave” (*devekut*) to the progeny of the Prophet Muhammad and strive to adhere to their spiritual authority. In an interesting typological *ta’wil* of the Qur’an, the Prophet himself describes his Holy House as a source of universal salvation: “The similitude of the People of my House is like that of the Ark of Noah (سفينة نوح): whoever embarks upon it is saved, and whoever does not is doomed.”³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ *Hadith* of Tirmidhi.

³⁸⁵ *Hadith* of Daylami.

³⁸⁶ *Hadith* of al-Hakim, al-Bazzar, Ahmad.

While the term “People of the House” can be used to denote a broader meaning, the “Greater *Ahl al-Bayt*,” which includes the wives of the Prophet who are “called the mothers of the believers” in the Qur’an (أُمّهات المؤمنين [Q 33:6.5]), the progeny of ‘Abbas (بنو عباس), and the progeny of ‘Ja’far (بنو جعفر), according to the *hadith* of Zaid b. Arqam in *Sahih Muslim*, as well as the “Special *Ahl al-Bayt*,” who are also called People of the Cloak or *Itrah*, it is also possible for *any* believer to be “adopted” into the Holy Family of the Prophet while not even having a drop of the Prophet’s blood in his veins. However, this can only be accomplished by fostering a deep love for the *Ahl al-Bayt* and more importantly, endearing oneself to the People of the House and becoming beloved to *them*. And when one is beloved by the Prophetic House, one is said to be beloved by God Himself. Thus the “People of the House” is sometimes referred to as the “People” or “Family of God” (أهل الله). When Salman the Persian arrived in Medina, both the *Muhajirin* and *Ansar* wanted to claim him for themselves, but due to Salman’s extraordinary love for the Prophet and his Family, the Prophet remarked: “Salman is from us - the People of the House!” (سلمان منا أهل بيت). Thus Salman remains forever the quintessential example of what it means to be *an adopted son of God’s Family*. We shall revisit these ideas when we come to the Gospel of John *Deo Volente*; namely, how *full* submissiveness and belief in Jesus as Christ render us “children of God,” meaning “*beloved* of God,” and that this “adoption” into “God’s own family” is further accomplished by endearing ourselves to the Holy House (*Hagioikos*) of Christ. Thus identical to the message of Muhammad, the love of Christ and his Family is the foundation (أساس) of the message of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Three: Gospel of John (إنجيل يوحنا): From the Hymn to the *Logos* to the Cleansing of the Temple (1:1-2:25)

Introduction

Although the bulk of the present work will focus on interpreting John's (extended) "Book of Signs" (chapters 1:19-12:50) through a Sufi lens, I believe it to be critical for me to initially engage with the exquisite "Hymn to the Logos" (chapter 1:1-1:18) in order to both respond to its "normative" Trinitarian (مثالتي)/ Incarnationalist (جسماني, حلولي) reading as well as to establish my own Islamic theo-mystical unitarian (مواحدي) Christological voice. My methodology for this section, the theo-mystical textually-affirming *polemirenic* approach, demands that I accept the Johannine text *a priori*, deeming it to be the very *Injil* referenced time and again in the Qur'an. The Gospel of John represents the cultic or *theological* essence of the *Injil*, a "master narrative" (*Meistererzählung*),³⁸⁷ while the Synoptics, Luke for instance, highlights its social message: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to evangelize the poor, He has sent me to proclaim the release of prisoners, to give sight to the blind, and to set free the oppressed." (πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμέ οὗ ἕνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς ἀπέσταλκέν με κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἁφέσει [Luke 4:18]). This exegesis will concentrate on the former and read the Johannine

³⁸⁷ Jorn Rusen, "Kann gestern besser werden? Über die Verwandlung der Vergangenheit in Geschichte," in *Kann gestern besser werden?* (ed. Jorn Rusen; Berlin: Kadmos, 2003), 29-30.

text as a mystical exposition of the goals of human existence in both abodes (في دارين): the “Mysticism of Personality”³⁸⁸ and the incomprehensible *Visio Beatifica* respectively. The central themes that I will be dealing with here are: 1) The primordial and personal Messianic light/soul v. the pre-eternal and impersonal Messianic decree; 2) *Ilham* (non-prophetic divine inspiration) as “hyperbolic eulogy” and John the evangelist as *al-Mulham*, الملهم (the Inspired); 3) Christ as God’s perfected and *divinized* theomorphic agent; 4) Muhammad as eschatological Mosaic prophet; 5) Jesus as “lamb of God” and its soteriological implications; 6) Wedding (γάμος) as analogy for mystical union (*theosis* or *jama*’); 7) “water into wine” as an indication (إشارة) of the mystical path (طريقة) and the actualization (تحقيق) of its goal; 8) “The Cleansing of the Temple” as symbolic Sufi action. All translations of Arabic, Greek Hebrew, Farsi, or Latin are mine unless otherwise stated. I will translate the Gospel of John from *The UBS Greek New Testament*, 4th ed., published by Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, edited by the Alands, Karavidopoulos, Martini, and Metzger, 2007.

The Primordial (Pre-Temporal) Messianic Light: The Logos as Personal and Created

The Gospel of John, like the Torah and the Qur’an, begins with the preposition “in” (Gr. ἐν; Heb. ב; Ar. ب as in بسم الله) with the *dagesh* (Arab. *nuqtah*) of the *bayt* (Arab. *baa*) representing the cosmos’ initial point of singularity, the starting point of all creation according to some Muslim mystics, “in the beginning was the word” (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος [John 1:1.1]), although with no definite article before “beginning” thus mirroring Genesis’ opening prepositional phrase (בְּרֵאשִׁית; *B’raysheeth*), meaning literally “in a

³⁸⁸ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2011), 5.

beginning,” although it is held that articles can be omitted in prepositional phrases thus rendering their nouns definite according to meaning.³⁸⁹ We shall return to this rule later. This *relative* “beginning” does not imply the essential pre-eternality (القدم الذاتي) of “the word;” it is not “In the beginning the Word already existed”³⁹⁰ as some Incarnationalists (جسمانيون) claim due to the imperfect הָיָה. Pre-eternality belongs exclusively to “the Father;” He is the first *without* a beginning because He is without origin; מִי כִּיהְנָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (“Who is like the Lord our God?” [Psalm 113.1.5]); ليس كمثله شيء (“There is nothing like Him at all” [Q 42:11.5]). It rather suggests that “the Word” (ὁ λόγος), or “the Son,” possesses an ontological precedence with respect to the rest of creation (القدم النسبة); he may be the Primordial Man (Heb. אָדָם קְדָמוֹן; Arab. الإنسان القديم), the one who was preeminently created in God’s “image” (צֶלֶם). In other words, the Logos, or Messianic light (φῶς), was God’s first and most exalted creation (Arab. *khalq*; Gr. κτισμα), “the firstborn of all creation” (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως [Col. 1:15.9]), according to Paul’s famous phrase, and created *ex nihilo* (من عدم) “from nonbeing” (*ex ouk onton*).³⁹¹ Thus while the Logos is *pre-temporal*, he is not *pre-eternal* (*prohyparchein*) as Justin’s Logos-theology suggests.³⁹² Schnelle says: “The λόγος concept intentionally opens up a broad cultural vista: the worlds of Greco-Roman philosophy and education and of Hellenistic Judaism of the Alexandrian type.”³⁹³ Writing independently of the New Testament, Philo refers to the Logos as the “firstborn son” (πρωτογονος) of God,³⁹⁴ and “the Man after His

³⁸⁹ F. Blass, A. DeBrunner, Robert Funk, (B-D-F) *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1961), p. 133, sect. 255.

³⁹⁰ Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 275.

³⁹¹ Arius, *Epistula ad Eusebium Nicomediensem* 1.5.

³⁹² *Dial.* 62.

³⁹³ Udo Schnelle, Trans. M. Eugene Boring, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 688.

³⁹⁴ Peder Borgen, *Logos was the True Light* (Tapir, 1983) 15; cf. *Conf.* 146 and *Leg. all.* I 43.

image.”³⁹⁵ Both John and Philo also refer to the Logos as “the Son of God”³⁹⁶ and “share [an] interest in making people ‘children of God’ through the agency of the Logos.”³⁹⁷

Therefore “Philo appears in most discussions of the Fourth Gospel, as an illustration of the presence of some Johannine themes in first-century Jewish literature.”³⁹⁸ Philo famously says:

But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a Son of God, let him press to take his place under God’s First-born, the Word, who holds the eldership among the angels, their ruler as it were. And many names are his, for he is called, “the Beginning,” and the Name of God, and His Word, and the Man after His image, and “he that sees,” that is Israel.³⁹⁹

Thus surely “there was once when he (the word) was not” (ἦν ποτε οὐκ ἦν).⁴⁰⁰

The Logos (كلمة) is the manifestation (تجلي) of God’s *fiat* “Let there be light” (*Ye’hi ore* [יְהי אור Genesis 1:3.5]). According to this “*Fiat Lux* Christology,” this light (*lux*) was “the light of humanity” (τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων [John 1:4.9]) in the sense that the remainder of creation is its derivative and created *through* it (πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο [John 1:3.1]).

Thus Junayd’s student Abu Bakr al-Shibli (d. 334/946) answered his questioner’s question, “Who are you?” (من انت؟) by saying, “I am the dot which is beneath the *baa*” (انا النقطة التي تحت الباء),⁴⁰¹ that is to say, he realized his very soul as being an extension of the primordial Messianic, or in this case, Muhammadan light, the primordial point of cosmic singularity. We can imagine God telling Christ just as He told Muhammad, لو لأك ما خلقت

³⁹⁵ This is Borgen’s translation; cf. *ibid*, 129.

³⁹⁶ *ibid*, 130.

³⁹⁷ Harold W. Attridge, “Philo and John: Two Riffs on One Logos,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XVII, eds. David T. Runia and Gregory E. Sterling (Providence: Brown University Press, 2005), 108-109.

³⁹⁸ *ibid*, 104.

³⁹⁹ This is Borgen’s translation; Borgen, *Logos was the True Light*, 129; cf. *Conf.* 146.

⁴⁰⁰ This was the credo of the Arians that was specifically denounced by the Nicene Creed.

⁴⁰¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4 vols., (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah), vol. 3, 342.

افلاك (“If not for you, I would not have created the spheres”).⁴⁰² The dot (*nuqtah*) of the *ba*’ also represents the locus of “meeting” between divinity (*lahut*) and humanity (*nasut*). Nasr says: “According to the science of the symbolism of Arabic orthography, the *alif* symbolizes the descent of the Divine Word from the world of Divine Transcendence, and *ba*’ its reception in the human world and in human language, which is thereby sanctified. The point under the *ba*’ symbolizes the meeting place of the two letters, of the vertical and the horizontal.”⁴⁰³ Thus all prophets are “dots under the *ba*” as they are vessels through which God's pre-eternal *Kalam* is indicated through articulated Revelation (His *Kalimat*).

The Logos is the very wisdom (חָכְמָה) of God personified and formed (קִנּוּי) “at (the) beginning, before His works of old” (רִאשִׁית דְּרָבּוֹ קִדְּם מִפְּעֻלָּיו מֵאֲזַן [Prov. 8:22]), “before the earth began” (מִקֵּדֶם מִי־אֶרֶץ [Prov. 8:23.9]). The Logos was also preeminently “with God” (πρὸς τὸν θεόν [John 1:1.5]), a glorious primordial state of mystical union (*jama'*) with the Father, or what Junayd referred to as “The Day of the Covenant” (يَوْمِ السَّيِّدِ) - “the most perfect existence and the most realized.”⁴⁰⁴ According to Junayd, the final goal or end (*telos*) of our lives is *returning* to that glory (δόξα), just as Christ prayed for himself: “And now glorify me, O Father, with yourself with the glory I had with you *before the world began*” (καὶ νῦν δόξασόν με σύ πάτερ παρὰ σεαυτῷ τῇ δόξῃ ἣν εἶχον πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι παρὰ σοί [John 17:5]). Our memories of the unitive bliss of the *Yawm Alast* compel our souls (أرواح) to seek mystical union (جمع) with God in this very life by the annihilation (فناء) of our ego-selves (نفوس). Such glimmers (لوائح) and flashes

⁴⁰² There is weakness in this *hadith* as stated earlier.

⁴⁰³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ed.-in-Chief, *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary*, xxxiii.

⁴⁰⁴ Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996), 260.

(لوامع) are mere fore-tastings (أذواق) of the magnificent *Visio Beatifica* (الرؤيا) of God experienced by the denizens of Paradise, a return to the *Yawm Alast*. The actualization (تحقيق) of unitive bliss (فناء في الواحد الحق) possibly called “glory” (δοξα) by Jesus, “which the disciples saw,”⁴⁰⁵ was precisely what Christ wanted for his disciples in his “high priestly prayer” - “that they also might become one in us” (ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ὧσιν [John 17:21.5]). Certainly this *perichoretic* “oneness” (وحدانية), or “mutual indwelling,”⁴⁰⁶ “reciprocal immanence”⁴⁰⁷ cannot be ontological, which would render Jesus, Peter, Thomas, John, and the rest of the apostles (حواريون) partners (Gr. κοινωνοί; Arab. *shuraka*) in godhead (لاهوت). Thus the essence of the cultic aspect of the Gospel is to provide humanity with a spiritual path in which they might actualize the goal of *both* abodes: Mystical union (*theosis*) in this life by adherence to the Messianic teaching and Precedent, and eternal communion with God in the Hereafter - “grace upon grace” (χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος [John 1:16.9]). However, I agree with Coloe that the preposition ἀντί is better translated as “instead of” rather than “upon,” as in ἀντίχριστος (“Instead of Christ”) in 1 John 2:8. Thus adherence to Moses alone is no longer sufficient as the path to God; it has been replaced by full faith in *both* Moses and Jesus Christ. Thus while I do understand “upon” as denoting a type of compounded grace, or “grace in addition to grace,” the “abrogating” element needs to be highlighted as well.

The third strophe and conclusion of John 1:1 reads, “And divine (lit. a god) was the word” (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος), with no definite article before *theos*, hence my

⁴⁰⁵ Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 285.

⁴⁰⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, “God in the World-the World in God: Perichoresis in Trinity and Eschatology” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 369-381.

⁴⁰⁷ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 710.

translation “divine.” Anarthrous pre-verbal predicate nominatives are “most likely qualitative” according to Wallace.⁴⁰⁸ (Although there is much disagreement concerning this among Greek grammarians who state that the context will ultimately determine the meaning).⁴⁰⁹ Christ is “God’s shadow” walking upon the earth, a human reflection of the divine attributes, “the image of the invisible God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου [Col. 1:15.1]), and God’s sanctified “heavenly agent”⁴¹⁰ who only acts and speaks according to God’s pleasure. Indeed this sounds like Philo’s Logos; thus Goodenough maintains that the Gospel of John represents mystical Judaism,⁴¹¹ while according to Holladay, being a θεῖος ἀνὴρ in Hellenistic Judaism means to become a “Platonic sage” such as Plato’s philosopher king in the *Republic*.⁴¹² Borgen says: “H. Odeberg, G. Quispel, N.A. Dahl have suggested that the Fourth Gospel reflects early stages of *Merkabah* mysticism,”⁴¹³ and that this mysticism also influenced Philo.⁴¹⁴ Sadananda refers to John’s Christology as “divine Agent Christology”⁴¹⁵ or “sub-ordinate Christology.”⁴¹⁶ Christ is annihilated in God’s very ethos so that every action of Christ is “as if” (*ka-anna*) God’s action (Ὡς

⁴⁰⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 269.

⁴⁰⁹ For example, E. C. Colwell says in his article, “A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament” (published in JBL (52:1 [1933] 12-21): “The absence of the article does not make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it.” This became commonly known as “Colwell’s Rule.” With respect to John 1.1.9 he concludes, “The context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John, for this statement cannot be regarded as strange in the prologue of the gospel which reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas.” I will argue, however, that the context of John 1:1.9 does in fact demand *theos* to be taken as qualitative. Jesus is *never* called *ho theos* in the Gospel of John and Thomas statement is obviously exclamatory.

⁴¹⁰ Borgen, *Logos was the True Light*, 128.

⁴¹¹ *ibid.*

⁴¹² Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 3.

⁴¹³ *ibid.* *Merkabah* or Chariot Mysticism is a school of early Jewish mysticism that highlights ascensions into Heaven, divine visions, and communion with angels. *Merkabah* is related etymologically to the Arabic markab (مركب), meaning “riding vessel,” and is exemplified in the *Mi’raj* of the Prophet Muhammad who ascended into heaven upon a riding beast, communed with angels, and experienced the Beatific Vision.

⁴¹⁴ Borgen, *Logos was the True Light*, 129.

⁴¹⁵ D.R. Sadananda, *The Johannine Exegesis of God* (BZNW 121; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 280.

⁴¹⁶ *ibid.*, 285.

δύναμαι ἐγὼ ποιεῖν ἅπ' ἐμαυτοῦ οὐδέν [John 5:30.1]); every word of Christ is “as if” (*ka-anna*) God’s word (ἐγὼ ἐξ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐκ ἐλάλησα [John 12:49.1]). Even Schnelle says: “*The Sent One only represents the Sender, but the sending is as though the Sender himself has come; he not only brings a message, but is himself the message*”⁴¹⁷ (emphasis is Schnelle’s). The above exegesis of John 1:1 has treated the Logos as being analogous to “the Son;” it, or rather *he*, is personal and non-eternal, yet pre-temporal (as we know time) and created. The Father is the only one called by the arthrous “God” (ὁ θεός) in John 1:1 thus He is *alone* “the very God” (*autotheos*),⁴¹⁸ while the Logos (Son) is “a god,” or a “divine” (θεός), meaning “godlike, lordly, divinized.” Eventually, by God’s permission, the ἀσαρκος Logos (the Messianic light/soul) “incarnated” (σὰρξ ἐγένετο) and dwelt (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us (John 1:14.1.5) as the ἐνσαρκος Jesus of Nazareth, the Messenger of God, some 2,000 years ago. Thus *Fiat Lux* Ontological Christology cannot be accurately described as “Neoplatonic-oriented Arianism” as some Trinitarians have characterized it.⁴¹⁹ While it shares with Arianism a belief that Jesus Christ is from the “best of creation” (*ktisma teleion*),⁴²⁰ it differs from Neo-Platonism in the sense that God actively chose to create the Logos by the exercise of His absolutely free will (*boule*). The Logos was not caused by an involuntary “spillage” of light resulting from God’s “self-intellection” (تعقل),⁴²¹ nor was it “a natural begetting” as in Trinitarianism “causing” or “generating” a son who is “eternally begotten,”⁴²² an extremely problematic and self-

⁴¹⁷ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 681.

⁴¹⁸ Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 2.2.

⁴¹⁹ Bauckham and Mosser, eds. *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” by Martin Hengel, 273.

⁴²⁰ Tarmo Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 81.

⁴²¹ Hulyar Yaldir, “Ibn Sina and Descartes on the Origins and Structure of the Universe: Cosmology and Cosmogony,” *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* Vol. 5, (2009), 10.

⁴²² Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 24.

contradicting phrase - “the unoriginated originated?” Rather the Son was created by the Father because the latter *wanted* to because He is “the ‘governing principle’ (*arche*) in regard to the Word”;⁴²³ nothing compelled (يجبر) Him nor was it “natural” (طبيعي); it was an exercise of God’s absolute volition (ارادة مطلق) as a demonstration of His love, “For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16.1). Even if Alexander was right, contra Arius, that there was no interval of time (*diastema*) “between God and His Word,”⁴²⁴ this does not necessarily make the Word *ontologically* identical with God, but only His first creature. Even Origen recognized that *ho theos* and *theos* corresponded to uncaused (Father) and caused/generated (Son) respectively because a cause is greater than its effect, hence “the Father is *greater* than I,” (John 14:28.9) with “I” (μου) denoting “the Son/Logos” in juxtaposition to the Father, and not Jesus (the Word incarnated). It would be without question that “the Father” is greater than the *man* Jesus of Nazareth, thus Jesus is referring to his Sonship and not his obvious incarnational limitations. Arius and Methodius were correct, *causal* priority equates ontological precedence regardless of temporal considerations.⁴²⁵ Unfortunately for Alexander, if the Word was pre-eternal *and* personal (the Son), as is his position, then this cannot be monotheism.⁴²⁶ To confess two

⁴²³ *ibid*, 62; cf. Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.10.

⁴²⁴ Murray Rae, “The Testimony of Works in the Christology of John’s Gospel,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 301. Cf. Rowan Williams, *Arius*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001); Pannenburg, *Jesus - God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968).

⁴²⁵ Arius wrote to Alexander: “God being the cause of all is without beginning, most alone; but the Son, begotten by the Father, created and founded before the ages, was not before he was begotten. Rather the Son, begotten timelessly before everything, alone was caused to subsist by the Father. For he is not everlasting or co-everlasting or unbegotten with the Father. Nor does he have being with the Father, as certain individuals mention things relatively and bring into the discussion two unbegotten causes. But God is thus before all as a monad and cause.” *Letter of Arius and Alexander of Alexandria*, II, translated by William G. Rusch; cf. *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 31-32, 33-37.

⁴²⁶ Chadwick quotes Arius in his *The Early Church* (pg. 124): “The Son who is tempted, suffers, and dies, however exalted he may be, is not equal to the immutable Father beyond pain and death, if he is other than the Father, he is inferior.”

distinct pre-eternal persons (hypostatic entities) is two confess two gods (Binitarianism). Thus it is difficult to consider Justin, Origen, and Tertullian monotheists who refer to the Son as “another God” (ἄλλος θεός),⁴²⁷ “another God” (ἕτερος θεός),⁴²⁸ and “second” (*secundus*)⁴²⁹ respectively; a “second” or “another God” in addition to the Father God is two gods - “Do not take two gods” (لا تتخذوا إلهين اثنين) [Q 16:51.5].⁴³⁰ For Muslims, the orthodox appeal to *homoousios* does not solve the problem either. Plurality “within” God only exists on the level of non-hypostatic (impersonal) qualities (صفات), while God is just one (واحد) person. A separate and distinct *person* cannot share God’s essence, this is *shirk*.

Trinitarian exegetes have made the argument that elsewhere in the Prologue the word *theos* appears as anarthrous in several places (John 1:6.5, 1:12.5, 1:13.9, 1:18.1, 3:2.5), and that these *must* be translated as “God” according to the context. For example, “There was a man sent from God (παρὰ θεοῦ) named John” (v. 6); and a translation that reads, “There was a man sent from a divine (or a god) named John” is just untenable. Thus καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος may be rendered “And the word was God,” despite *theos* being anarthrous. This point is well taken. The B-D-F, however, specifically mentions that the article is often missing when *theos* is used in a prepositional phrase, but the meaning is “God,”⁴³¹ while in John 1:1.9, *theos* follows a conjunction and is therefore nominative. It *could* still be translated as “God,” but I would contend that the anarthrous reference to the Logos as *theos* in John 1:1 specifically, is meant precisely to both hyperbolically praise

⁴²⁷ *Dial.* 56-62.

⁴²⁸ *Dial.* 2.3

⁴²⁹ *Prax.* 3, 8.

⁴³⁰ Although Philo also calls the Logos “a second God.” See below.

⁴³¹ B-D-F, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*., p. 133, sect. 254.

the Logos as well as to ontologically *distinguish* it from God (*ho theos*), the Father, while Schnelle maintains that *theos* is a predicate nominative “in order to express the essential divine being of the Logos and still at the same time to distinguish the Logos from the most high God.”⁴³² Schnelle’s explanation of the Logos is similar to a Maturidite theologian describing the relationship between the Essence (ذات) and attribute of Speech (كلام), stating that God and the Logos are “equally original,” yet God cannot be conceived of the Logos “apart from his Word.”⁴³³ However if the Logos possesses an “essential divine being” but is *distinct* from the “most high God,” then how can he *be* the most high God? He must be a lesser “god” or “divinity” hence the anarthrous *theos*. Jesus is *never* called *ho theos* (with the article) in the whole of John, and “the article appears when the specific Jewish or Christian God or Lord is meant (not ‘a being of divine nature’ or ‘a Lord’).”⁴³⁴ Philo also makes a sharp distinction between θεός and ὁ θεός, applying the latter exclusively to “the Existent,” the one God who is the cause of things.⁴³⁵ While Trinitarian exegetes such as Schnelle⁴³⁶ readily emphasize that indeed the Father and Son are separate and distinct persons of God while ontologically co-substantial (*homoousios*), otherwise we are left with Sabellianism/Modal Monarchism, given the fact that τὸν θεόν

⁴³² Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 694.

⁴³³ Ibid. In response to Mu'tazilite elements who would accuse Sunnite theologians of making divine attributes such as *Kalam* into the Christian Jesus, Maturidi's supra-rational response was that the attributes of God are "neither Him nor anything other than Him" (لا هو ولا غيره). Therefore, while *Kalam* shares with the Christian Logos the descriptions of pre-eternality and uncreatedness, *Kalam* as God's Speech is not a separate and distinct hypostatic entity in addition to the hypostasis of God. *Kalam* rather gives "an additional meaning" (معنى زائد) to the Essence (ذات) and has no reality apart from it. The Mu'tazilite position was rather to *reduce the attributes to the Essence* in order to avoid the Sunnite position of what they considered to be the belief in two pre-eternal hypostatic entities. The said, "He knows by a knowledge *that is Him*" (عالم بعلم هو هو), i.e. the attributes of God in the Qur'an are really just nominal designations for the Essence Itself. See: Nader El-Bizri, "God: Essence and Attributes," in *Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 1212-140; Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, *Sharh al-fiqh al-akbar* (Hyderabad, 1948).

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Cf. Philo, *Dreams* 1:229-230, 239-241.

⁴³⁶ Schnelle writes “Logos/Son” appositively in his commentary on the Prologue. See: Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 669.

refers *only* to the Father, the one the Logos (Son) was “with” (πρὸς), if we should replace ὁ λόγος with “the Son” in καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος, since Rae tells us “Logos and Son are one and the same,”⁴³⁷ we get exactly the type of Modal Monarchism that Trinitarians are wont to condemn: “In the beginning was the Son, and the Son was with the Father, *and the Son was the Father*.”⁴³⁸ Even Irenaeus admits, “Now it is the *Father* who made all things through him” (emphasis mine),⁴³⁹ after describing the Father as the “one God Almighty” (*unus Deus omnipotens*).⁴⁴⁰ According to Athanasius, to say that the Father and the Son are the same person breaches Trinitarian theology: “Everything that can be said of the Father can also be said of the Son, *except his being called ‘Father’*” (emphasis mine).⁴⁴¹ Many proto-orthodox (such as Callistus), however, were almost compelled to

⁴³⁷ Murray Rae, “The Testimony of Works in the Christology of John’s Gospel,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 301.

⁴³⁸ Trinitarians run into the same problem in their translations of Isaiah 9:6. In order to give the title of “Mighty God” (*El Gibbor*) to “the Son” (who “will be born” no less), they change the voice of the present active verb, *yiqra* (He will call), into the passive (He will be called) without seeming to notice the presence of a clear subject-doer. By doing so, however, the Son is also identified as the “Everlasting Father” (*Avi ’Ad*). And according to Trinitarian theology, the Son *cannot* be the Father, as they are two “separate and distinct persons.” If we leave the verb as active, however, the verse becomes much more intelligible: “...A son will be given to us who will bear the symbol of authority upon his shoulder. And the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father will call his name Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6.5.9). If I changed the imperfect “will call his name” to the perfect “called his name,” then this is a perfectly legitimate and cogent translation according to Rabbi Michael Skobac, Director of Education and Counselling of Jews for Judaism. I am aware that there are also Jewish translations of this verse that understand *yiqra*, or rather *v’yiqra*, to be passive in meaning as well as denoting the *past* tense (Qal imperfect with *vav*-consecutive). See: LXX (καλεῖται); *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 684; and Talmud Sanhedrin 94a. Jewish authorities contend, however, that even if *v’yiqra* is taken as passive with “his name” as its subject, it certainly does not make the Prince of Peace a deity since highly exalted theophoric names abound in the Hebrew scriptures: Elihu (My God is He), Eli (My God), Mahalalel (The Praise of God), Hezekiah (The Mighty God), *et al.* However *v’yiqra* is argued by Christians, and myself, as being rather a Qal imperfect with *vav*-conjunctive, hence the future tense. Furthermore, while *v’yiqra* may be construed as passive in meaning, the vowel pointings are literally Qal (active voice). The same verb (q-r-a) occurs as Niphal (passive) in Gen 2:23.5 (*yiqqarey*) and is correctly rendered as “shall be called” (זאת יקרא אשה), as well as the Pual (passive), albeit perfect, in Isa. 58:12, 65:1. Thus q-r-a is well attested in the Tanakh in the passive voice yet Isa. 9:6 utilizes the active vowel pointings (Qal).

⁴³⁹ *Adv. haer* 1.22.1 (SC 264:308.1-31). Quoted from: Bauckham and Mosser, eds. *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, “Christianizing Divine Aseity: Irenaeus Reads John” by D. Jeffrey Bingham, 59.

⁴⁴⁰ *Adv. haer* 3.11.1 (SC 211:140.18-21).

⁴⁴¹ This is Toom’s translation. See: Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 87; *C. Ar.* 1.5-6; 3.6.

adopt a Modalist position in order to remain monotheists since Justin had already spoken of the Logos as “another God” (ετερος θεος), and further qualified his position, “other I mean in number, not in will.”⁴⁴² More importantly, according to Jesus, “the Father” (ὁ Πάτερ [John 17:1.1]) by Himself is “*the only true God*” (τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν [John 17:3.5]). John 17:3 draws a clear distinction between “God” (not just the Father) and “Jesus Christ” who is “sent” (Gr. ἀπόστολος, Ar. رسول), and is thus the essential theological anchor of the Gospel of John.

αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σὲ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν καὶ ὃν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν (This is eternal life: to know You [O Father], the only true God, and (to know) the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ).

Such anchoring (ترسيخ) establishes the acceptable boundaries (حدود), or “ideal parameters,” of Johannine Christological hermeneutics for Muslims. Thus context does indeed determine the usage of *theos*, whether arthrous or anarthrous in the New Testament, but in light of John 17:3, the *ancora theologiae* of the Gospel of John, the Father is the *only* one who is *truly* God (Allah); all other persons who are called *theos* or *elohim* (in the OT), be it Christ (John 1:18.5 [μονογενὴς θεὸς]), Moses (Exo. 7:1.5 [אֱלֹהִים]), Israelites (Psalm 82:6 [אֱלֹהִים]), or Satan (2 Cor. 4:4 [ὁ θεὸς]) are called *theos* figuratively (مجازي); either because they represent God and speak with His authority or because they possess extraordinary qualities that make them unique amongst creation. John 17:3 is to John what Mark 12:29 is to Mark; it is the very creedal witness (شهادة) of Jesus and his disciples: *laa ilaha illa Allah*, *‘Isa rasul Allah*, (لا اله الا الله عيسى رسول الله).⁴⁴³ Interestingly, the word “god” used to describe Satan is actually arthrous! - ὁ θεὸς τοῦ

⁴⁴² Quoted from: Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 85. Cf. *Trypho* 56.

⁴⁴³ “There is no god but Allah and Jesus is the Messenger of Allah.”

αἰῶνος τούτου (“the god of this age”). However Christian exegetes understand the figurative usage here; Satan possesses the extraordinary ability to “blind the minds” of humanity (ἐτύφλωσεν τὰ νοήματα), according to Paul, yet his influences are limited and do not extend beyond this world. Yet in the Gospel of John specifically, Jesus is *never* described by the anarthrous *ho theos*,⁴⁴⁴ but only by the anarthrous *theos*; God (the Father) is described by both, because He is not only Divine but *literally* (حقيقي) Deity (“God”). ὁ θεὸς and Πάτερ are interchangeable, ὁ υἱός/ ὁ λόγος/ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός and ὁ θεὸς are not. Jesus is only “*deus incarnatus*” (an enfleshed god) figuratively and honorifically because “Indeed I am God and not a man” (וְאֵנִי אֱלֹהִים וְלֹא אָדָם [Hosea 11:9]). If Christ is essentially equated with God, and “the Creator himself became a creature,”⁴⁴⁵ then the Tanakh and New Testament become irreconcilable and the Marcionite position is justified. Therefore, it is only when we exclude ontological sameness from Jesus’ “divinity” that “preparation” and “consummation”⁴⁴⁶ as distinct stages of Revelation become realized in sacred history; “for the law (Torah) was given through Moses, and grace and truth (Gospel) have come through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The significance of this becomes clear when we analyze the Prologue’s conclusion, John 1:18, as it appears in the UBS 4th edition and translate it through a Trinitarian lens: θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε: μονογενὴς θεὸς, ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο (“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who had made him

⁴⁴⁴ In John 20:28, Thomas exclaims after seeing the raised Christ, ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (“My Lord and my God!”). According to Wallace, the definite articles before “Lord” and “God” are most likely intended as vocative particles. He refers to this structure as the “nominative of address.” Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, 56-58. I imagine that if I saw my beloved teacher and friend walking around as a resurrected body I would also exclaim, “Oh my God!”

⁴⁴⁵ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 673.

⁴⁴⁶ Bauckham and Mosser, eds. *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” by Martin Hengel, 286.

known”).⁴⁴⁷ Both occurrences of the word *theos* are anarthrous, however if we translate the second occurrence in reference to Jesus as “God,” then the first part of the verse is absolutely and summarily refuted since people saw Jesus. Jesus cannot be God (Deity). Despite this, Justin said that Jacob did in fact wrestle with “God!”⁴⁴⁸ Rather to stay consistent with John 1:1 and 17:3, our theological anchors at the two ends of the Gospel, the verse may be translated, “No one has ever seen God (the Father, the Deity, the *autotheos*); a unique god (divinized creation/ perfected agent/ “theomorphic” reflection) who is beloved of the Father (God), made Him known [lit. “exegeted”].” Jesus gives us God’s *mahabbah* by teaching His *ma’rifah*. Hengel says, “The Logos has made visible the invisible Father by revealing his love.”⁴⁴⁹ Indeed.

Referring to a human being as “divinized” or even θεός is a reality in the writings of Philo, the great Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who calls Moses “a god” (θεός) ten times in his *Questions on Exodus*, while explaining the enigmatic Exo 7:1.⁴⁵⁰ Litwa states: “Like his philosophical contemporaries, Philo too recognized several tiers of divinity. At the top of the pyramid is the supreme God, whom Philo calls “the Existent” (ὁ ὄν), a designation he borrows from Exod 3:14. Since the high God is Being itself, Philo does not think that a human can become or even share the Existent’s nature. To think so would, for Philo, be tantamount to blasphemy.”⁴⁵¹ Thus Moses is not θεός “in

⁴⁴⁷ This is Boring’s translation of Schnelle’s German translation. See: Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 672.

⁴⁴⁸ *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 126.

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid*, 287. Jesus’ knowledge of God is comparable to that of Moses’ who saw God’s “back” (Exo. 33:23). Maimonides takes this to mean that while Moses could not possibly know God as God knows Himself, God as “Godself,” he knew Him to the extent that it is possible for a human being - he saw His “back.” Cf. *Guide for the Perplexed*, I, 21.

⁴⁵⁰ Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 1.

⁴⁵¹ *ibid*, 6.

truth” (προς αληθειαν).⁴⁵² For Philo, the will of Moses had merged with that of God, thus rendering Moses a “partner” in what God owned; all things were given to Moses when God adopted him as His friend.⁴⁵³ Commenting on Philo, Feldman clarifies that Moses is only “*akin* to G-d.”⁴⁵⁴ Litwa says: “To be akin to God - part of God’s family - is to be divine, although not identical with the primal God.”⁴⁵⁵ Philo’s use of “god” (θεος) as well as his concepts of (Philonic) divinization and mystical union give us incredible insight not only into the world of the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher who lived at the time of Christ, but also into several Johannine themes⁴⁵⁶ that New Testament scholars have struggled with for centuries. According to Anderson, the “key” to understanding the Father and Son Johannine relationship is the “Prophet-like-Moses motif.”⁴⁵⁷ Litwa says: “The apparent nail in the coffin of Moses’ - or anyone’s deification in Philo is the oft-quoted passage in Embassy to Gaius 118: ‘Sooner could God transform into a human than a human into God’” (Θαπτον γαρ αν εις ανθρωπον Θεον η εις Θεον ανθρωπον μεταβαλιν).⁴⁵⁸

Speaking of John the Baptist, the Qur’an is clearly alluding to John 1:7: “(John) came to bear witness concerning the light, so that all might believe (in Christ) through him,” when it says: “witnessing (the truth) of a unique *word* (Arab. *kalimah* [كلمة]; Gr. Logos [λόγος]; Heb. *dabbar* [דַּבָּר])⁴⁵⁹ of God” (Q 3:39.5). My translation of *kalimah* as

⁴⁵² *ibid*, 7.

⁴⁵³ *ibid*, 11.

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid*, 14.

⁴⁵⁵ *ibid*.

⁴⁵⁶ Attridge, “Philo and John: Two Riffs on One Logos,” in in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XVII, eds. David T. Runia and Gregory E. Sterling, 104.

⁴⁵⁷ Paul N. Anderson, “On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John’s Christological Tensions,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 332.

⁴⁵⁸ Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” in in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 2.

⁴⁵⁹ Targumic *memra* (Syriac).

“unique word” is based on the fact that anarthrous (نكرة) nouns and adjectives in the Qur’an, especially when used to qualify prophets, imply that their referents possess qualities that are distinctive, extraordinary, exceptional, superlative, or unique.⁴⁶⁰ Hence the Prophet Muhammad isn’t simply “the mercy of God” or “the Messenger of God,” but is more properly described as a special mercy رحمة (Q 21:107) and a distinctive messenger of God رسول من الله (Q 98:2.1) with both “mercy” and “messenger” as anarthrous; he is the personification of God’s unique mercy and His messenger *par excellence*. Thus Jesus is called “a unique god” in John 1:18 because he is distinctively divinized, the perfect human mirror (مראה) of God’s attributes (صفات), and one who reminds his people that they too can attain divinization (*theosis*) as their forefathers did - “Is it not written... you are gods” (Θεοί ἐστε [John 10:34.5.9])? The author of 2 Peter refers to Jesus’ teachings about mystical union when he describes them as “great and precious promises” through which believers in Christ “might be partners in the *divine disposition*” (γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως [2 Peter 1:4.5]). Al-Suyuti comments on Q 3:39.5 by saying: “Word of God means Jesus, because he is the Spirit of God (روح الله); he is called ‘word’ because God *created him* by saying the word ‘Be!’” (Arab. كن [Q 3:47]; Heb. יהי [Gen. 1:3.5]; Lat. *Fiat!*), كلمة الله: اي بعيسى انه روح الله, وسمى كلمة لانه خلق بكلمة: (قول الحق) *Qawl al-Haqq*.⁴⁶¹ Al-Qurtubi states that the construct noun in the phrase *Qawl al-Haqq* meaning “the Word of Truth” appearing in Q 19:34.5 can be read as either accusative or nominative. As accusative, the “Word” would refer to the preceding narrative or statements about Jesus and therefore highlight the Qur’an’s corrective aspect with respect

⁴⁶⁰ See the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Malik (d. 672/1274).

⁴⁶¹ *Kalimat’ullah: Ay bi-’Isa, annahu Ruh Allah; wa summiya kalimah li-annahu khuliqa bi-kalimati ‘kun* (Suyuti, *Jalalayn*, 3:39).

to the Christian narrative - the Qur'an as a corrective. But a nominative reading would make the "Word" a permutative of the preceding noun "Jesus," the son of Mary. Jesus is the "Word of Truth (God)!" - the Qur'an as a confirmation.⁴⁶²

There may be some intertextuality at play here as well. Perhaps John 1:18 mimics Psalm 110:1.1.5 in which David writes, "The Lord said to my lord" (יְהוָה לְאֵלֹהֵי). Luke twice quoted this verse (Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34) directly from the Septuagint which rendered the tetragrammaton *yod-he-vav-he* (*Shem Ha Mephorash*) and the possessive noun *adoniy* as the *same* Greek arthrous noun *kurios*: ὁ κύριος τῷ κυρίῳ μου. The first *kurios*, however, is essentially different than the second *kurios*, just as the first *theos* in John 1:18 is essentially different (εἶπερος) that the second *theos*. For John, however, the overtly militaristic analogy of Psalm 110:1 in which the Messiah is envisioned as God's "right-hand" general whose enemies are made his footstool, needs a relational make-over. Thus while Jesus is the true Messiah and certainly would fight⁴⁶³ if his "kingdom were of this world" (John 18:36.5), the more precise analogy for John is a Messiah who lies in the very "bosom" (κόλπος), or heart of God, just as the enigmatic "Beloved Disciple," probably the author of the Gospel, leans upon the κόλπος of Christ (John 13:23). While Hengel denies any Johannine allusion to Psalm 110, despite its crucial importance to

⁴⁶² *Tafsir Qurtubi*, 19:34.

⁴⁶³ If I were translating the Qur'an into Greek, the optimal word that I would use to communicate all of the nuances of the Arabic "Jihad" would be ἀγων (contend, fight, struggle, strive), used by Plato in the Republic and used as a verb and infinitive construct (ἀγωνίζομαι; *jaahada*, *yujaahidu*; *jihad*) in the koine New Testament to indicate both a martial as well as a spiritual/internal/symbolic struggle: Ἀγωνίζου τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα τῆς πίστεως (1 Tim. 6:12); Εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἦν ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οἱ ὑπηρέται οἱ ἐμοὶ ἠγωνίζοντο (John 18:36). The NAV Arabic translation of the Bible, *Kitab al-Hayah* (1988), indeed translates the imperative Ἀγωνίζου in 1 Tim. 6:12 as the infinitive "*jihad*," while the imperfect verb ἠγωνίζοντο from John 18:36 is rendered into the imperfect verb *yujaahiduna*. Under the heading الجهاد الحسن ("The Beautiful Jihad"), Paul says: "Make good the struggle in the fight for beautiful faith" ([1 Tim 6:12] معركة الايمان الجميلة); "My kingdom is not from this world; if my kingdom were from this world, my disciples would have fought so that I would not be handed over to the Jews" ([John 18:36] ليست مملكتي من هذا العلم, لو كانت مملكتي من هذا العلم, لكان حراسي يجاهدون لكي لا اسلم الى اليهود).

early Christians, and thus early Christology,⁴⁶⁴ I believe that John does in fact have this passage in mind which captures “the image of the unique unity of Father and Son in a relationship of love.”⁴⁶⁵ Qur’anically, Jesus is the epitome of “those nearest to God” (من المقربين [Q 3:44.9]), a *muqarrab* par excellence which Ibn ‘Ajibah describes as one whose “states (أحوال) become perfected so that he is ever *by* his Lord (بربه) and *for* his Lord (لربه), and receives no news except from God, and has no dwelling except with God... the one brought near has realized effacement and subsistence (المحقق بالفناء والبقاء).”⁴⁶⁶ There is no nearness nearer than remaining in the very heart of God.

Translation of the Prologue with the Logos as Primordial and Personal Messianic Light:

(1) At the beginning (of creation) was the word (light/soul of the Messiah [*nur/ruh Masih*]), and the word was with⁴⁶⁷ Allah (while annihilated in God), and the word was divine (sanctified/holy/chosen [*Ruh Allah*]). (2) This was in the beginning (of creation) with Allah. (3) (Then) all created things were made through him (his word), and nothing was made apart from him. What has come to be (4) in him (his word) was life, and the life was the light of humanity. (5) And the light (continues) to shine in the darkness, but the darkness cannot grasp it. (6) There was a man sent by Allah named Yahya. (7) (Yahya) came to bear witness concerning the light, so that all might believe (in al-Masih) through him. (8) (Yahya) was not the light, but (he came) to bear witness concerning the light. (9) The true light (al-Masih), the one that illuminates every human being, was coming into the world. (10) He was in the world, and the world was made through him, but the world did not recognize him. (11) He came into his own people⁴⁶⁸ (the Jews) but his own did not accept him. (12) But to those who did accept him

⁴⁶⁴ See: Martin Hengel, ““Sit at My Right Hand!”” In Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 119-225; cf. Martin Hengel “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser, 286.

⁴⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 69-70.

⁴⁶⁷ Meaning he was *distinct* from God.

⁴⁶⁸ Literally “his own things” (τὰ ἴδια); the term is a “reference to Israel, God’s own possession.” Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 279.

and believe in his name,⁴⁶⁹ he gave authority (the teaching and the path) to be children (beloved) of Allah.⁴⁷⁰ (13) Those who, not from blood, nor from the will of flesh, nor from the will of man, but from Allah have been born (chosen and made beloved). (14) And the word became flesh and dwelled⁴⁷¹ among us, and we experienced his glory, the glory as a unique son of a father, full of grace and truth. (15) Yahya witnessed concerning him and cried out saying, 'This was the one of whom I said, the one who comes after me has been before me, because he was (created) first. (16) And that out of his fullness (due to his teaching and example), we all received grace instead of grace. (17) Because the law (Torah) was given through Musa, and grace and truth (Injil) have come through 'Isa al-Masih. (18) No one has ever seen Allah (the Father, the Deity); a unique god (divinized creation/ perfected agent/ 'theomorphic' reflection) who is close to the Father (Allah),⁴⁷² made Him known [lit. "exegeted" Him]).

The Pre-Eternal Messianic Decree: The Logos as Impersonal and Uncreated

Muslims can also treat the Logos as being impersonal and eternal as in contemporary Socinian Unitarianism. *It is only when Trinitarians claim that the Logos is personal **and** pre-eternal that Islamic notions of radical monotheism are compromised.*⁴⁷³

Two (or three) pre-eternal separate and distinct persons who are each fully God is not quite *Tawhid*; "They do blaspheme who say, 'God (the Father) is one of three (persons) (ثالث ثلاثة)' (Q 5:73.1). Here the Logos is a pre-eternal decree (أمر) of God, not a created personality, but rather "made" personal at his birth according to God's will (إرادة). This decree has been "with God" (πρὸς τὸν θεόν) since "the beginning." Here we are abiding

⁴⁶⁹ The Qur'an says: "His *name* (اسم) shall be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary," or rather "he shall be *called* Christ..." (Q 3:45.5). The Greek ὄνομα and Arabic اسم, although usually translated as "name," are being used in John 1:12 and Q 3:45 to denote the title of Jesus, "the Christ" (المسيح).

⁴⁷⁰ Interesting, al-Biq'a'i omitted the phrase "children of God" from this verse in his Diatesseron. See: Saleh and Casey, "An Islamic Diatesseron: Al-Biq'a'i's Harmony of the Four Gospels," in *Translating the Bible into Arabic: Historical, Text-Critical, and Literary Aspects*, Binay and Leder, eds., 94.

⁴⁷¹ Literally "tabernacled, tented" (ἐσκήνωσεν).

⁴⁷² Literally, "The one who is in the chest of the Father" with εἰς being used "in the local sense" for ἐν, cf. B-D-F, p. 110-111, sect. 205.

⁴⁷³ Unitarian Christian scholar Buzzard cites the following patristic writings as espousing what he considers to be deviant prehistorical Sonship contra the biblical view: Ignatius, *Ephesians*, 7.1; *Smyrneans*, 1.1; *Magnesians* 8.2; Aristides, *Apology* 15.1; Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.21, 33; Melito, *Discourse on Faith*, 4. See: Anthony Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian* (Morrow: Restoration Fellowship, 2007), 204-205.

by B-D-F's rule regarding the omission of the article in prepositional phrases.⁴⁷⁴ Thus "beginning" (ἀρχή) here does not mean the beginning of creation, but is rather a metaphorical way of saying that the decree (Logos) was *always* in "the Mind of God," as it were, just as God decreed that Satan would be a "mankiller" (ἀνθρωποκτόνος) right "from the beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς [John 8:44.5]). Perhaps Plato was able to intuit some of these realities when he proposed his theory of forms; that there are archetypes of all material objects in a higher realm, what al-Ghazali might have called "forms" (صور) in "the unseen world and the dominion" (عالم الغيب و الملكوت), or perhaps what some theosophists like Ibn Sina called forms in the "mind of God" (*ante res*);⁴⁷⁵ archetypal forms which He brings into existence according to His will. We were all there in His mind (will), as pre-existent yet impersonal decrees or "words" (λογoi), until an appointed time and place (موعدة) in which God manifested/created us in the material realm (عالم الملك) (و الشهادة)⁴⁷⁶ – The words (λογoi) became flesh (σαρξ), to use the Johannine phrase.⁴⁷⁷ Ibn al-'Arabi says, "All creatures are indeed *words of God*... stemming as they do from (the command) Be! (*Kun!*)."⁴⁷⁸ Consider God's words to Jeremiah (1:5), "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (בטרם אצורך בבטן ידעתיד). The Prophet Jeremiah was simply a manifestation (تجلي) of divine attributes (صفات الهي), willed into existence according to God's knowledge (علم) and divine fiat, "Be!" (كن). Finally, in this regard, the Qur'an

⁴⁷⁴ See note 3.

⁴⁷⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Sharh 'Aja'ib al-Qalb, The Marvels of the Heart*, 58.

⁴⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, 2.5.1.

⁴⁷⁷ This is nearly how Socinian Unitarian Christians understand the Prologue of the Gospel of John; namely that the word (Ο λογος) was pre-eternal and impersonal ("all things were made through *it*" [not him], 1:3). They maintain that if the word is understood as pre-eternal *and* personal (as Trinitarians understand it) then monotheism, in fact the very creed of Christ himself has been compromised. See: Anthony Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian* (Morrow: Restoration Fellowship, 2007). Interestingly, Tyndale also translated "through it" before the KJV's "by him" (1611).

⁴⁷⁸ Muhyiddin Ibn Al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, translated by R.W.J. Austin (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 178.

repeatedly says, and specifically in reference to Jesus, “Whenever He decrees a matter (امر), He only *says to it* (يقول له), ‘Be!’ and it is” (Q 2:117; 3:47; 19:35; 40:68). The matter is *already there*, “residing” in God’s mind (في لوح محفوظ; “inscribed in a Preserved Slate” [85:22]) since eternity (من ازلي). Yet “it” is impersonal; there is neither “he” nor “she” except for Him (هو).

We can also think of the difference between *Kalam qadim* and *kalimah* (*Kalam lafthi*) with respect to the Qur’an as being akin to Theophilus’ distinction between “the Logos in the mind” (*logos endiathetos*) and “the Logos expressed” (*logos prophorikos*) with respect to Christ, although the proto-orthodox apologist certainly affirmed the pre-eternal hypostasis of the Son; he was only trying to demonstrate the Father’s causal priority over the Son. Just as the *mashaf* (codex; *kalimat*) of the recited Qur’an is a created reflection or manifestation of the pre-eternal Speech of God (*Kalam*), Christ as *Kalimah*/Logos (of God) is a created reflection or manifestation of the pre-eternal *Kalam*/Logos of God. Toom mentions that Irenaeus, Ambrose, and Athanasius repudiated Theophilus’ analogy because of its potential dangers; that the analogy could be used by heteroousion and subordinationist “heretics” to deny the Logos’ hypostatic pre-eternality. In fact, the analogy “was explicitly condemned at the Council of Sirmium in AD 351.”⁴⁷⁹

Divine Attribute (صفة) <u>Pre-eternal/not personal</u>	Divine Action (تعلق) <u>in History</u>	Manifestation (تجلي) of the Attribute <u>in creation as creation</u>
Λόγος (Decree) in كلام (<i>Logos endiathetos</i>)	“Be!” (كن)	Jesus Christ (The “Word” [كلمة] of God) (<i>Logos prophorikos</i>) ⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 63.

⁴⁸⁰ See: Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 2.10, 2.22.

This type of metaphysical language was not exclusive to the Johannine community; it was echoed by the Essenes at Qumran in one of their ‘Thanksgiving Hymns:’

All these things (Thou didst establish in Thy wisdom. Thou didst appoint) all Thy works before ever creating them: the host of Thy spirits and the Congregation (of Thy Holy Ones, the heavens and all) their hosts and the earth and all it brings forth. In the seas and deeps... and an everlasting task; for Thou hast established them from *before eternity* (emphasis mine).⁴⁸¹

Thus the Logos is not the Messianic light or soul as a separate created entity distinct from God, but rather represents the *intention* of God to create the Messiah at his birth in Bethlehem. In this sense, the creations of every John, Paul, and Mary were also decrees in God’s Mind. However, the decree to create the Messiah as a sapiential work takes precedence in *rank*, not in temporality, because he is possibly the most beloved of all creation to God. The Messiah seems to be the Pole of human existence and the apex of the cosmos, or at least for Israel. Thus my translation of John 1:15.5 will be adjusted to capture this nuance of understanding: “John witnessed concerning him and cried out saying, ‘This was the one of whom I said, the one who comes after me is preferred before me, because he was higher (πρωτός) in rank than I.” This is akin to the Qur’anic statement that the Prophet Muhammad is not only the “first” Muslim “in this nation” (في هذه الأمة) according to al-Suyuti, but also the “the foremost of the Muslims.” Thus the *ayah* may be translated in two ways: “I have been ordered to be the first of those who submit,” or “I have been decreed (أُمرت, passive voice) to be the foremost (in rank) of all submitters” (Q 39:12).

⁴⁸¹ This is Vermes’ translation. See: Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin, 1995), 227.

My current exegetical stance that the Logos is the pre-eternal messianic decree, in contrast to the Logos as primordial messianic light, precludes us from assigning (a) person(ality) (*hypostasis*) to the Logos before it was “enfleshed.” And although the Greek word λόγος is masculine, it is lexically, not naturally, male. Thus “all (created) things were made through *it*, and apart from *it* not one thing was made.” (John 1:3). Apparently, all of creation pivots around this particular Logos. The Qur’an says, “We will make him (Jesus) a sign (آية) unto humanity, and a mercy (رحمة [anarthrous]) from us; *it was a matter* (امر) *already decreed* (مقضية)” (Q 19:21.5.9). Thus the “word (*amr*) was made flesh” when “Gabriel breathed into the opening of Mary’s shirt and she perceived a fetus in her womb.”⁴⁸² Therefore Jesus is figuratively (مجازي) and honorifically (تكريمي) called “the Spirit of God” (روح الله). The Qur’an further says, “God gives thee glad tidings of a unique word (كلمة/λόγος) from Him whose name *shall be* the Christ, Jesus, the son of Mary” (Q 3:45) - “the Logos made Messiah.” By comparison, Luke 1:35.5 says, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you (ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ) and the power of the Most High will overshadow (ἐπισκιάσει) you.” However, the key phrase in the Lukan annunciation occurs next: “Therefore *for this reason*, the holy thing that will be born shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35.9). Here “Son of God” (υἱὸς Θεοῦ) is synonymous with the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the *personal* “Savior” of Israel, and cannot refer to his alleged pre-existence before his birth, because Luke unequivocally says “for this reason” (διὸ καὶ). In other words, it is precisely because of the Holy Spirit’s “coming upon” and “overshadowing” of Mary that the Logos now merits the title Son of God; before this time, he is not the Son (the Christ), not even a *person* (*hypostasis*), and

⁴⁸² Suyuti, *al-Jalalayn*, 19:21.

certainly not Jesus of Nazareth. He is “God’s Son in a unique sense as being the direct creation of the One God.”⁴⁸³ Consider also God’s promise to David concerning the Messiah, “I will be (אֲנִי) his Father and he shall be (אֲנִי) my son” (2 Samuel 7:14.1), with both verbs in the present active indicative yet unequivocally pointing to the future.

This was not a literal begetting; Jesus is called “Son of God” figuratively and honorifically (إضافة التكریم). It has nothing to do with sex, contra Mormonism and Muslim polemicism, nor ontological sameness, contra “homoousion” (same essence) Incarnationalism. Furthermore, according to this exegesis, “light” is no longer essentially identical with “Logos;” the word “light” (or “true light”) is used as a laudable *nom de plume* for Jesus in order to contrast him with the Baptist; it is a Christological appellation denoting Jesus’ sacred historical reality in the *world*, not his supposed prehistory before the world. God, “the First Light” (النور الأول) and “Real Light” (النور الحق), according to Ghazali, is “the one in whose Hand is the creation and *decree*” (الذي بيده الخلق والأمر)⁴⁸⁴ and when anything else is called light it is “sheer metaphor” (مجاز محض).⁴⁸⁵ Thus verses six through thirteen of the Prologue should be understood as a slight excursus and *photo*-Christological commentary on Jesus Christ and his relationship to humanity. In verse fourteen of the Prologue the evangelist returns to the theme of the Logos and it is only *after* the critical statement ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (John 1:14.1) that we find the Logos described as “unique Son” (μονογενὴς υἱός) or “Jesus Christ” (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός).

⁴⁸³ Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian*, 211.

⁴⁸⁴ *Miskat al-Anwar*, 1.39.12.

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid*, 1.38.4.

Translation of the Prologue with the Logos as Pre-Eternal and Impersonal Messianic Decree:

(1) In the Beginning, there was the word (preeminent decree), and the word was with God (in His knowledge), and the word was divine (sanctified/holy/chosen). (2) This was in the Beginning with God. (3) All created things were made through *it*, and apart from *it* not one thing was made. What has come to be (4) in it was life, and the life was the light of humanity. (5) And the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot grasp it.

(6) There was a man sent by God named Yahya. (7) (Yahya) came to bear witness concerning the light, so that all might believe (in the light) through him. (8) (Yahya) was not the light, but (he came) to bear witness concerning the light. (9) The true light (al-Masih), the one that illuminates every human being, was coming into the world. (10) He was in the world, and the world was made through him, but the world did not recognize him. (11) He came into his own people⁴⁸⁶ (the Jews) but his own did not accept him. (12) But those who did accept him and believe in his name, he gave them authority (the teaching and the path) to be children of God. (13) Those who, not from blood, nor from the will of flesh, nor from the will of man, but from Allah have been born (chosen and made beloved).

(14) And the word became flesh and dwelled⁴⁸⁷ among us, and we experienced his glory, the glory as a unique son of a father, full of grace and truth. (15) Yahya witnessed concerning him and cried out saying, “This was the one of whom I said, the one who comes after me is preferred before me, because he was higher in rank (than I).” (16) And that out of his fullness (due to his teaching and example), we all received grace instead of grace. (17) Because the law (Torah) was given through Musa, and grace and truth (Injil) have come through ‘Isa al-Masih. (18) No one has ever seen Allah (the Father, the Deity); a unique god (divinized creation/ perfected agent/ ‘theomorphic’ reflection) who is close to the Father (Allah), made Him known [lit. ‘exegeted’ Him]].

Philo and the Logos

For the Jewish philosopher Philo, the Logos represents “God’s Mind;” it is the “second God” (δευτερος θεος).⁴⁸⁸ Litwa says that the Logos is personified as “the noetic being who typically represents the fullness of divinity as far as it can be known to human

⁴⁸⁶ Literally “his own things” (τὰ ἴδια).

⁴⁸⁷ Literally “tabernacled, tented” (ἐσκήνωσεν).

⁴⁸⁸ Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 6, 9; cf. *QG* 2.62.

beings.”⁴⁸⁹ Participation in the Logos, or “Mind of God” “deifies” one according to Philonic understandings of mystical union, and causes one to enter into “affinity (οικειοῦνται) with that which IS.”⁴⁹⁰ Since all human beings have a spark of the Divine Breath within them, they all contain a fragment, or “ray of the shiny Logos”⁴⁹¹ and can therefore achieve this union by transforming their individual minds (*nous*) and actualizing the Logos - they become “gods” (Θεοί), but *not* ontologically. “The distance between the Existent and generate reality is absolute. The distance between the divine Logos and human beings is not. They exist in a part-to-whole relationship, since humans are a fragment of the divine Mind.”⁴⁹² Perhaps Ibn Rushd intimated these things when he referred to the “contact” (اتصال) of the acquired intellect (νοῦς?) with the “Active Intellect” (Λογος?).⁴⁹³ In other words, the individual must render his wants and desires totally in accordance with the preferential Will of God. Winston describes this aspect as Philo’s mysticism by stating: “All the facilities, feeling, intellect and will must be cleansed and brought into harmony with the Eternal Will. This is the Sufi doctrine of unification: an old Persian writer says that it means the cessation of human volition and affirmation of the Divine Will, so as to exclude all personal initiative.”⁴⁹⁴ An aspirant must bring his individual *nous* into union with the Logos, so that his mind may “ascribe all things to God.”⁴⁹⁵ There can be no *direct* participation with the Existent; one is

⁴⁸⁹ *ibid*, 9

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid*, 20; cf. *Dreams* 2.228.

⁴⁹¹ Attridge, “Philo and John: Two Riffs on One Logos,” in in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XVII, eds. David T. Runia and Gregory E. Sterling, 105.

⁴⁹² Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” in in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 25.

⁴⁹³ Winston, “Philo’s Mysticism,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. VIII, ed. David T. Runia, 74.

⁴⁹⁴ *ibid*, 77.

⁴⁹⁵ *ibid*.

divinized by contact with the Word, the Logos. The Logos is the means to God.

According to Litwa: "Philo's exaltation of the Existent as the sole source of the divine and alone worthy of worship made his theology distinctive (indeed, distinctively Jewish)."⁴⁹⁶ How may we then harmonize Philo's Logos with John? Christ is called the Logos according to John because Christ never speaks, in his words, "on my own" (ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ); he is completely annihilated in the obedience of the Father (ὁ ὢν), and is thus a perfected manifestation of the Logos and even honorifically called "the Logos" by the evangelist. Just as the Logos, being "the highest manifestation of shareable divinity,"⁴⁹⁷ is the mediator between the Existent and man in Philonic philosophy, Israel must align itself with the *nous* of Christ, representing the Logos, in order to be in obedience with the Father's Will. Christ is the incarnation of the Logos in the sense that he is a perfect reflection of the Father at the level of flesh and blood; those who see the Son see the Father because the Son perpetually witnesses (*mushahada*) the vision (*mu'ayana*) of the Father and mediates this vision for others.⁴⁹⁸ Unlike Philo, the major focus is on the Jewish Messiah, but "like Philo, the Fourth Gospel finds that knowledge is intimately connected to action: one knows who God is by obeying."⁴⁹⁹ Those who see the actions of Christ are seeing the actions of the Father due the former's annihilation in the latter.

Similarly, when the true Sufi experiences the world, having brought his will (*nous*) into

⁴⁹⁶ Litwa, "The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria," in in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 26. For the Jewish origin of the Logos see: Raymond E. Brown, "Appendix II, The Word," in his *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966) 519-524; Peder Borgen, "Logos Was the True Light," in his *Logos Was the True Light and Other Essays on the Gospel of John* (Trondheim: Tapir Publishers, 1983), 95-110; "Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John," in *Logos Was the True Light* by Peder Borgen, 13-21; Mary Coloe, "The Structure of the Prologue and Genesis 1," *ABR* 45 (1997): 40-55.

⁴⁹⁷ Litwa, "The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria," in in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 9.

⁴⁹⁸ Borgen, *Logos was the True Light*, 129.

⁴⁹⁹ Attridge, "Philo and John: Two Riffs on One Logos," in in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XVII, eds. David T. Runia and Gregory E. Sterling, 117.

alignment with the Prophetic ethos, the latter of which reflecting the Mind (Logos) of God (“He [the Prophet] never speaks *on his own*” [Q 53:3]), he begins to ascribe all things to God, as he (Ali) once said: “I never see anything except that I see God before it” (ما رأيت شيء إلا رأيت الله قبله). Hengel agrees that John finds a parallel with Philo, but the notion that “the eternal Word is of one being with God” transcends the “preparatory wisdom myth” of Proverbs, Wisdom, and Philo.⁵⁰⁰ However, by transcending Philo in such a manner, John, *according to Hengel*, “transcends” Judaism in a way that is theologically unacceptable. While Hengel insists that we must not “read John with Marcionite eyes,” and that the roots of John’s high Christology lies not in “pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer myth” but rather “in biblical Jewish thought,”⁵⁰¹ his *homousion* reading of the Prologue, while not declaring another God separate from Yahweh, renders it almost impossible to bring together the Old and New Testaments, and ironically, posits the seeds of Marcionism as a possible solution to the tension that such an exegesis creates. Indeed, Modal Monarchism, while obviously very problematic from an Islamic standpoint, developed as a reaction to the perceived polytheism of Justin’s Logos-theology. Anderson identified the problem perfectly: “The Johannine Jesus comes across in the most human - and the most divine - of portrayals *anywhere* in the New Testament”⁵⁰² (emphasis Anderson’s). The solution, however, lies not in undercutting the very theology espoused by the Scriptures that John quotes and alludes to over and over.

⁵⁰⁰ Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 272.

⁵⁰¹ *ibid*, 289.

⁵⁰² Paul N. Anderson, “On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John’s Christological Tensions,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 314.

Clarifying My Christology

From the standpoint of Islam's theo-mystical (Sufi) tradition, I believe that either Christology: 1) the Logos as personal primordial light; or 2) the Logos as impersonal pre-eternal decree, can be adopted by Muslim exegetes of John operating under the textual-affirming *polemirenic* approach, albeit with some important caveats since these Christologies raise some potential prophetological complications with respect to the Sufi belief in the priority of the Muhammadan light, an aspect of the "Reality of the Muhammadan Nature" (الحقيقة المحمدية): Is the light (نور) of Muhammad or Christ the initial creation from which all subsequent creation is derived? Was the cosmos created by God for the sake of Muhammad or Christ? Is Muhammad the best of creation (*ktisma teleion*) or Christ? Is my exegesis definitive proof that the early Sufis, due to their contacts with mystical Eastern Orthodox elements, assimilated aspects of Johannine-based Incarnationalist Christology into their mystical Muhammadan Prophetology? Did they simply recast Muhammad into the image of Christ? First of all, we should keep in mind that the Hymn to the Logos is essentially poetry (شعر), "in the style of the psalms, parallelisms written in a chiastic-chain structure,"⁵⁰³ and often times poets incorporate "hyperbolic eulogy" as a rhetorical device to demonstrate emphasis (توكيد) while teaching a lesson (عبرة). Such exaggerated praising (تحميد) does not preclude the poem's standing as true divine inspiration (إلهام) because the objective behind such eulogizing (مدح) is to impress upon the listener/reader a *spiritual* truth which may not, however, be historically or literally accurate. To praise the altruism (إيثار) of Moses, for instance, Rumi invents a story of him chasing down a single lost sheep for miles and becoming angry for what the

⁵⁰³ Martin Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 272.

sheep had done to itself - “This man is a good candidate for prophecy,” God remarks to the angels. The point is: Moses was selfless, and we should be too. The poet laureate of the Prophet Muhammad, Hassan b. Thabit, would often eulogize the Prophet while standing on a special pulpit (منبر) in the Prophet’s mosque in Medina. On one occasion, the Prophet commented about him, “Verily God helps Hassan with the Holy Spirit” (إن (إلهام)⁵⁰⁴ that is to say, Hassan’s poetry represents true inspiration (إلهام). This is the exact wording of how the Qur’an describes the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit ([2:87.5] (وَأَيَّدَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ)). Hassan once recited:

- لما رايت انواره سقعت وضعت من خيفتي كفي على بصري
Lamma ra’aytu anwara-hu saqa’at, wadha’tu min khifatiy kaffiy ‘ala basariy
 When I saw his lights approaching, I had to shield my eyes with my palm,
 - خوفا على بصري من حسن صورته
Khawfan ‘ala basariy, min husni suratihi,
 Out of fear for my eyesight, due to the beauty of his illuminating face,
 - فلست انظره الا على قدرتي روح من النور في جسم من القمر
Fa-lastu anthuru-hu illa ‘ala qadri, ruhun min al-Nuri fi jismin min al-Qamari,
 I could scarcely look at him, a soul from Light incarnated in a body from the Moon,
 - كحلية نسجت من الانجم الزهر
Ka-hilyatin nusijat min al-anjumi al-zuhri.
 Like a mantle made up of shining stars!

Whether Hassan had to *actually* shield his eyes or not is not of consequence, the point is Muhammad was beautiful (جميل) and majestic (جليل). In the same way, “the Inspired” (*al-Mulham*) Johannine author, directed by the Holy Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον), was moved to eulogize Jesus in the Prologue simply in order to demonstrate the greatness (تكريم) and eminence (تفضيل) of the Messiah. But perhaps more important than the recognition of potential hyperbole in the Prologue is the realization that John’s Gospel sees itself as the true consummation of the promises of God to Israel. This fact

⁵⁰⁴ Arabic text is from: Imam Abu ‘Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Shamaail Tirmidhi*, translated by Muhammad b. ‘Aburrahman Ebrahim, 228; translation of Arabic is mine.

must not escape the Muslim reader. The Hymn outlines Christ's crucial significance in meta/sacred history with respect to Judaism, hence the immediate mirroring of the Book of Genesis in John 1:1. The *ilham ilahi* (divine inspiration) of John revealed the truth that Jesus Christ was one of the greatest and most beloved created entities in the history of creation, but in *reality*, and based on نبوة (prophetic apocalypse) received by Muhammad, it is the latter who is the *absolute* "best of creation" (خير خلق الله) - "I am the Master of the children of Adam, and it is no boast," أنا سيد ولد آدم ولا فخر. *Wahy* always outranks *ilham/ihā'a*⁵⁰⁵ just as the words of Isaiah or Jeremiah outrank the words of the Deuteronomistic Historian, the Chronicler, or the Song Writer.⁵⁰⁶ The writings of the latter are no doubt true and sacred, but we must be cognizant of a hierarchy of Revelation. The four Gospels seem to contain all three degrees of Revelation: 1) *Tanzil* (تنزيل) or "*verba wahy*": The Lord's Prayer and Beatitudes; 2) *Nabuwwa* (نبوة) or "*vox wahy*": The High Priestly Prayer and Travel Narrative 3) *Ilham* (إلهام) or "*vox ihā'i*": The Johannine Prologue, words of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Peter, James, and Paul's exquisite Hymn to Love (1 Cor. 13:4-8). While inspired poetry (*ilham*) utilizes hyperbole to make a Prophetological or Christological point which may or may not be *literally* true, prophetic *hadith* (*vox wahy*) may employ figurative (*majazī*) expressions to explicate (meta)historical *reality*. Thus the statement of the Prophet in the *Musannaf* of Abu Bakr 'Abd al-Razzaq (d. 211/826) in which the Prophet told Jabir, "The first thing God created was the light of your Prophet from His light;" this does not literally mean that

⁵⁰⁵ Usmani contends that Revelation received by non-prophets should be referred to as *ihā'a* (إيحاء), from the same etymology as *wahy* (وحي), or referred to as *ilham* (إلهام), but must not be called *wahy*, as the latter only refers to *prophetic* Revelation, either *verba* (word-for-word) or *vox* (periphrastically). See: Usmani, trans. by Siddiqui, *An Approach to the Quranic Sciences*, 115-117.

⁵⁰⁶ The author of the Song of Songs (*Shir HaShirim*).

Muhammad is a portion or piece of God or that he possesses ontological sameness as God; it is a way of expressing the Prophet's nearness (قرب) and annihilation (فناء) in God while affirming his *true* origin as God's initial creation. In the same way, when God says about Adam, "I will breath into him of My Spirit (روحي)," the language implies that Adam (and his progeny) are highly favored by God because He made Adam His vicegerent (خليفة) upon the earth. Even Hassan clarified this figurative sense when he declared:

- و شق له من اسمه ليجله

wa shaqqa lahu min ismihi liyujillahu

And (God) drew out a name for him from His own name *in order to exalt him*,

- فذو العرش محمود و هذا محمد

fa dhul-`arshi Mahmûdun wa hâdhâ Muhammadu.

For the possessor of the Throne is Mahmud (محمود) and this is Muhammad (محمد).

Thus in the language of the Nicene Creed, Muhammad may *figuratively* be called, "god from God, light from Light, spirit from Spirit, name from Name." The Qur'an and the *hadith* of the Prophet are poetical but explicitly repudiated as being poetry - "We have not instructed the Prophet in poetry (شعر), nor is it proper for him," (36:69.1.5). That is because they constitute *wahy* (Revelation) as the *ipsissima verba* and *ipsissima vox* of God respectively. They utilize figurative (*majazi*) expressions to emphasize true events in sacred metahistory, whereas *ilham* such as inspired poetry, may invent stories and events for the purpose of hyperbolic praising of a person in order to teach a true *lesson*. Thus the Prologue is *true myth*. Harpur says commenting on poetry within the context of the Gospels: "Though fiction, they are supremely true. But they are not exact history, nor can they ever be."⁵⁰⁷ One may object to the above by pointing out

⁵⁰⁷ Harpur, *The Pagan Christ: Is Blind Faith Killing Christianity?*, 154.

that both the Qur'an (*tanzil*) and the New Testament Jesus (*wahy*) employ parable (مثل) as a preferred method of pedagogy, and parables are not intended to describe true historical events; there may not have ever been an actual Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) or "Companions of the City" (اصحاب القرية [Q 36:14-29]). It may be argued that the theological or moral lesson (عبرة) is important here. The parables in the Qur'an and New Testament, however, do not involve *named* (sacred) historical figures. Jesus does not reveal the actual identities of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24), nor the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) because they are not actual people. Likewise, the Qur'an does not provide us the names of the three messengers that were sent to the City. This story is called a *mathal* (parable), and although Muslims believe that it constitutes the *ipsissima verba* of God (*tanzil*, *verba wahy*), the tale does not necessarily need to be historically true. But despite the Qur'an's identification of the literary genre of the story as parable, celebrated exegete Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373) seems to have accepted the historicity of the story and mentions something quite remarkable in his *Tafsir Qur'an al-Karim*. He says in his commentary of Q 36:14 ("Behold! We sent to them two [messengers], but they belied them both, so We strengthened them with a third, and they said, 'Verily, we are missionaries sent to you!'"): "Ibn Jarir said from Wahb b. Sulayman who said from Shu'ayb al-Jaba'i that the names of the first two missionaries were *Sham'un* (Simon [Peter]) and *Yuhanna* (John), and the name of the third was *Bulus* (Paul; Gr. Παῦλος),⁵⁰⁸ and the City is *Antakiyya* (Antioch)!" Could it be that the Qur'an

⁵⁰⁸ Umar F. Abd-Allah says, "Paul himself understood Christ in terms of the law, ascribing to him qualities which in Rabbinic Judaism were attributes of the law alone. Even for Paul, there was a distinction between God's law *per se*, which was good, and Pharisaic 'legalism,' which was not." Abd-Allah, "Theological Dimensions of Islamic Law," in *Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 240.

is engaging intertextually with the Book of Acts? - “And in these days prophets⁵⁰⁹ came from Jerusalem to Antioch” (Ἐν ταύταις δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις κατήλθον ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων προφητὰ εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν [Acts 11:27]). Is the story at the heart of “the heart of the Qur’an” (قلب القرآن)⁵¹⁰ about the apostles of Jesus Christ? - About Paul, the “corrupter” of the Gospel according to many Muslim polemicists?! These are questions that Muslims need to think about deeply.

Being the penultimate Messenger of God, the immediate mission of Jesus Christ was limited to Israel (“his own” [τὰ ἴδια]), and as the Messiah, he possesses the highest rank (مقام) of any Israelite prophet, including Moses, and represents the most exalted of God’s decrees (*logoi*) for His chosen people. But it is Muhammad, the universal Messenger, eschatological Prophet and Seal (خاتم), and Grand Intercessor (شفيع) on the Day of Resurrection who possesses the “praiseworthy station” (مقام محمود [Q 17:79]), the mastery (سيادة) over all humanity, and in Jesus’ Parousia (رجوع) to the earth, the Messiah will follow the law (شريعة) and Precedent (سنة) of Muhammad in order to demonstrate Muhammad’s truthfulness to the People of the Book (أهل الكتاب). In fact, it is the consensus (إجماع) all of scholars of Sunni orthodoxy (أهل السنة و الجماعة) that the Prophet Muhammad outranks all human beings, jinn, and angels. This belief is articulated by Imam Ibrahim al-Laqani’s famous *Precious Pearl of Monotheism*⁵¹¹ (*Jawhara al-Tawhid*):

⁵⁰⁹ The word “prophet” as eventually defined by Sunnite authorities does not equate to its usage here in Acts. For Luke, prophets (pl. προφηται) seem to be individuals who speak the words of God through what I would call, Level III Revelation.

⁵¹⁰ This is the honorific title of Surah 36 (*Ya Sin*). It is based upon a famous yet weak (*da’if*) *hadith* in Tirmidhi which reads: “Indeed everything has a heart, and the heart of the Qur’an is YaSin” (إن لكل شيء قلباً (وقلب القرآن يس).

⁵¹¹ Not to be confused with *The Pearl of Great Price*.

And the absolute best of all creation is our Prophet so leave all dispute,
And the (rest of the) Prophets follow him in preference (to God), and after them the
angels in rank...

The best of creation was chosen by God and with him our Lord completed prophethood
and made it universal.

*Wa afdhalu 'l khalqi 'ala 'l itlaqi nabiyyuna fa mil 'ani 'shiqaqi,
Wa 'l anbiya yalunahu bil-fadhli, wa ba 'dahum mala 'ikah thi 'l fadhli,
Wa khussa khayru 'l khalqi an qad tammama, bihi 'l jami 'a rabbuna wa 'ammama.*⁵¹²

Imam al-Busiri (d. 693/1294) also said in his world-famous *Qasidah al-Burda* (*Poem of the Cloak*):

- فمبلغ العلم فيه بشر

Fa mablaghu al- 'ilmi fihi annahu basharun,
For the extent of gnosis concerning him is that he is a human being,

- و انه خير خلق الله كلهم

Wa annahu khayru khalqillâhi kullihimi
And that he is the best of all of God's creation.

One may object to my quoting of poetry by claiming that al-Busiri's *Ilham* is just another example of hyperbolic eulogy, just as I said earlier about the Prologue. Al-Busiri, however, is simply repeating what the consensus of scholars before him had already articulated, namely, the Prophet Muhammad is the best of creation. Imam Al-Sawi (d. 1241), in his *Sharh Jawhara al-Tawhid* (*Commentary of the Precious Pearl*) said, "This assertion of superiority (تفضيل) is by consensus (اجمع) of the Muslims, both Sunnis and Mu'tazila, except al-Zamakhshari [in *al-Kashshaf* (4:712), Surat al-Takwir] who violated the consensus."⁵¹³ Thus *both* understandings of the Logos are true if understood within their Jewish contexts and fall within acceptable Christological Muslim exegesis of John:

1) The Logos (light of the Messiah) existed as a personalized soul before the creation of

⁵¹² al-Laqani, *Jawhara Logia* 65-66, 69.

⁵¹³ See: al-Sawi, *Sharh Jawhara*, 123. Because al-Zamakhshari said that the angels were better than the prophets. See: al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf* (4:712), *Surat al-Takwir*.

his body and would have been one of the first to answer “*Bala!*” on the *Yawn Alast* to God’s question, “Am I not your Lord?” But he was not *the* first, that was Muhammad. But do souls predate their bodies? Bukhari related a *hadith* of Abu Hurayrah in which the Prophet said that Adam and Moses once engaged in a debate in which “Adam overpowered Moses.” But where or when could such a debate have taken place? It appears that it took place “in heaven” before the creation of their physical bodies.⁵¹⁴ Ibn ‘Ajibah says: “Spirits are created before physical bodies and then infuse them like fire inside a glowing coal or sap inside a sapling.”⁵¹⁵ The light or soul (روح) of the Messiah was certainly one of the initial creations of God “at the beginning” and the source of lesser lights that followed him in temporality, but it was the light of Muhammad that preceded all in fact. 2) The Logos was a pre-eternal decree in God’s mind until both soul and body were created in Mary’s womb. God’s decree to create the Messiah is highlighted in the Prologue because it was the most important of God’s decrees for Israel, while God’s decree to create Muhammad is absolutely first because he is the shepherd of all humanity and the most beloved of God’s creatures (حبيب الله). Al-Sawi further says, “Its conclusion being that our Prophet is the best of creation in absolute terms, then Ibrahim, then Musa (Moses), then ‘Isa (Jesus), then Nuh (Noah), then the rest of the Messengers, then the non-Messenger Prophets - some of them being superior to others, but Allah alone knows in what detail, then Jibril (Gabriel), then Israfil (Seraphiel), then Mika'il (Michael), then ‘Izra'il (Azriel), then ‘common human beings’ (عوام البشر) such as Abu

⁵¹⁴ Allah's Apostle said, "Adam and Moses argued with each other. Moses said to Adam, 'You are Adam whose mistake expelled you from Paradise.' Adam said to him, 'You are Moses whom Allah selected as His Messenger and as the one to whom He spoke directly; yet you blame me for a thing which had already been written in my fate before my creation?' Allah's Apostle said twice, 'So, Adam overpowered Moses.'"

⁵¹⁵ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa'iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 35.

Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, and ‘Ali, then the mass of the angels.”⁵¹⁶ The ranking of the prophets after Muhammad, however, is open to much speculation and it is my contention that if we affirm the text of John and declare it to be the *Injil* of the Qur’an, then Jesus would be second in rank.

Perhaps there is another way to understand the Prologue where despite its identification as inspired poetry, Christ as the Logos is *not* being “hyperbolically eulogized,” but rather revealed by the *Mulham* as being a *true* secondary cause of the cosmos in view of its metahistory. In other words, it is literally true that “all created things were made *through him* (δι’ αὐτοῦ), and nothing was made apart from him” (John 11:3). With this said, according to recent scholarship, the *hadith* of Jabir quoted earlier, in which the Prophet Muhammad claims his light to be the initial creation, appears to have been fabricated (موضوع).⁵¹⁷ Ibn ‘Ajibah relates “certain narrations” (في بعض الأخبار) that state, “The first thing that God created was the *intellect*. (أول ما خلق الله العقل). Then he said to it, ‘Advance,’ and it advanced, and He said to it, ‘Go back,’ and it went back, and He said to it, ‘Be seated,’ and it sat down, and He said to it, ‘Arise!’ And it arose.” Ibn ‘Ajibah also remarks that “*hadith* speak of this as well” (والحديث متكلم فيه).⁵¹⁸ In other words, this intellect or “disembodied mind” remained in complete obedience and adoration of its Creator, in unitive bliss and *doxa* with God pre-somatically. This is precisely how Origen described the *Logos* who would incarnate and eventually become Jesus of Nazareth.⁵¹⁹ Ibn ‘Ajibah refers to this intellect, or Logos, as “the first light that

⁵¹⁶ al-Sawi, *Sharh Jawhara*, 297-298.

⁵¹⁷ Imam Yusuf al-Nabahani, *The Virtues of the Prophet and His Nation*, translation and notes by Jameer, 32.

⁵¹⁸ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 38.

⁵¹⁹ *De principiis*, 2:6.

God manifested in existence” (أول نور أظهره الله للوجود) and the “Supreme Spirit” (الروح), but also calls it “the primordial Muhammadan substance” (القبضة المحمدية) from which the lesser intellect extends.⁵²⁰ Sunnite theologians agree by consensus, however, that while it is permissible (جائز) to believe in the priority of the Muhammad light/soul, it is absolutely incumbent (واجب) to believe in that he is the best of creation and Master of mankind. The latter is due to the prevalence of *ahadith* on the matter such as: “I did not create a creation more honored to Me than you. Indeed, I created the world only in order to acquaint them with your honor and rank with Me. If it were not for you, I would have not created the world.”⁵²¹ Thus perhaps while the world was made *through* Christ, it was made *for the sake of* Muhammad. Perhaps Christ is the “alpha” and Muhammad is the “omega.” Either way, they were both created by God.

The Witness of John the Baptist

(19) And this is the witness of Yahya, when the Jews from Jerusalem sent to him priests and Levites to ask him, “Who are *you*?” (20) And he confessed and did not deny, and he confessed, “I am not al-Masih.” (21) And they asked him, “Who then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” Are you *the Prophet*? And he answered, “No.” (22) Therefore they said to him, “Who are you?! - we (need) to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” (23) He said, “I am a voice shouting in the desert, ‘make straight the way of the Lord!’ - just as the Prophet Isaiah said.” (24) And they (the priests and Levites) had been sent by the Pharisees. (25) And they asked him and said to him, “Then why do you baptize if you are not al-Masih, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” (26) And Yahya answered them saying, “I baptize with water - (but) among you stands one whom you do not know (well), (27) the one coming after me whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loosen!”⁵²² (28) These things happened in Bethany, beyond the Jordan River, where Yahya was baptizing.

⁵²⁰ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 38..

⁵²¹ (Hadith of Ibn ‘Asakir). وما خلقت خلقا أكرم علي منك. ولقد خلقت الدنيا وأهلها لأعرفهم كرامتك ومنزلتك عندي. ولو لأك خلقت الدنيا

⁵²² The reference to the sandal (ὐπόδημα) of Christ reminds me of the *hadith* of ‘Abdullah b. Mas’ud reported by Imam al-Salihi is which we are told that Ibn Mas’ud used to get up when the Prophet sat down and would remove the Prophet’s sandals and place them under his arm. For this reason, Ibn Mas’ud carries the blessed title “the carrier of the sandals” (حامل النعلين). The symbol of the blessed Muhammadan sandal is becoming more and more recognized in the world. Sandala Publications uses the image of the sandal as its

The Eschatological Prophet

We are told after the Prologue that the Jews from Jerusalem sent “priests” and “Levites” to John the Baptist to ask him, “Who are you?” (Σὺ τίς εἶ [John 1:19.9]). Despite an angel identifying the Baptist as one who comes “in the spirit and power of Elijah” in Luke 1:17, John denies that he is the Elijah (אֵלִיָּהּ), the Messiah, as well as “the Prophet” (Ο προφήτης) - *three* separate and distinct lines of prophecy. “The Prophet” here is undoubtedly a reference to the promise (وعد) of the eschatological “prophet like Moses” of Deuteronomy 18:18. Even Hengel says: “[John] is neither the Messiah nor the Elijah redivivus nor the eschatological prophet according to Deuteronomy 18 (cf. 3:28).”⁵²³ In my mind, this prophet succinctly describes Muhammad, who like Moses, was also given an entire system of law (شريعة).

נְבִיא אֲקִים לָהֶם מִקֶּרֶב אֶחְיֵיהֶם כְּמֹדֵי וְנִתְמַי דְּבָרֵי בְּפִי וְדִבַּר אֶלֵּיהֶם אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶנּוּ:
“A prophet I will raise for them from the midst of their brothers, and I will put my words into his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I will command him” (Deut. 18:18).

The translation of the famous KJV hardly does the Hebrew justice: “I will raise them up a Prophet...” First of all, the standard word order of the Hebrew verbal sentence (verb, subject, object, prepositional phrase) has been disregarded for the sake of emphasizing the direct object, “a prophet.” In addition to this fronting of the object, called *maf'ool muqadam* (مفعول مقدم) in Arabic, “prophet” is anarthrous, and as I stated earlier, anarthrous (نكرة) nouns and adjectives in the Qur'an, especially when used to qualify prophets, imply that their referents possess qualities that are distinctive,

logo. For an entire volume (in Arabic) dedicated to the sandal see: Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Maqqari, *Fath al-Muta'al fi Madh al-Ni'al* (Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2006).

⁵²³ Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 276.

extraordinary, exceptional, superlative, or unique. The Hebrew gives a sense of, “What a great prophet! - I will raise...” Emphasis of “prophet” is also detected in rabbinical cantillation of the verse in which “prophet” is read with a raised voice, “*NAVI aqem lahem miq-qerev...*”

In fact, it was Waraqah b. Nawfal, Khadijah’s cousin, who said after the Prophet’s theophany or *bi’thah* (lit. “raising”) in the cave, “Indeed the great law (الناموس الاكبر) has come unto you, just as (*kama*) it came to Moses.” The Arabic *namus* is from the Greek *nomos*, meaning law or Torah, and the particle of comparison *kama* (كما) is the very same particle used in Deut. 18:18, *kamo* (כָּמוֹ). The Qur’an also seems to have this verse in mind when it declares in a very early Meccan *surah*, thus shortly after the Prophet’s interaction with Waraqah, “Indeed We sent to you a Messenger to be a witness concerning you, just as (كما) We sent a Messenger to Pharaoh” (Q 73:15). The intertextuality cannot be denied. The Hebrew prepositional phrase in 18:18.5, “from the midst of their brothers” (מִקִּרְבֵּי אֶחָיוֹתָם) includes both fellow Israelites (Deut. 17:15) as well as Arabs (Deut. 2:8, 23:7), since the Edomites, descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau and although much maligned by the Israelites, were also Arabs. Finally, the words, “he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” echo both the Qur’anic passage: “By the Star when it goes down, your companion is neither astray nor wandering in his mind; and *he never speaks from his own self* (وما ينطق عن الهوى); it is no less than Revelation (وحي) revealed to him” (Q 53:1:3), as well as the *hadith*, “By the one who raised me in truth, nothing exists this (pointing to his mouth) except the truth.”⁵²⁴ We must be careful not to conflate “the Messiah” with “the Prophet,” as many Christian exegetes tend to do,

⁵²⁴ والذي بعثني بالحق لا يخرج منه إلا الحق (Hadith of Ahmad).

because the Johannine author as well as the initial audience of Jesus saw them as distinct figures: “When the crowd heard these words they said, ‘This is truly the Prophet’ (Οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ προφήτης). Others said, ‘This is the Messiah’ (Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός) ... And there was a division (σχίσμα) in the crowd concerning him” (John 7:40-41.1, 43). However, the Pharisees definitively retort, “Search the scriptures and see that from Galilee no prophet is to arise” (John 7:52.5.9), with the word “arise” (ἐγείρεται) seemingly intended to echo “I shall raise” (רָאִי). ‘Iraqi mathematician, physician, and son of a Moroccan Rabbi, Samuel (Samau’al) b. Yehudah al-Maghribi (d. 576/1180) tells his readers in his polemical treatise *Ifham al-Yahud* (*The Confounding of the Jews*) that the Prophet Samuel himself confirmed Deuteronomy 18:18 to be a reference to Muhammad in his dream, causing Ben Yehudah to convert to Islam.⁵²⁵ Thus we are able to identify the exact biblical verses that the Qur’an seems to reference in Q 7:157: “Those who follow the Sent One, the unlettered (or “Gentile”) Prophet (النبي الأمي), the one who is described in both the Torah (Deut. 18:18) and the *Gospel* (John 1:19-25)...”

The Lamb of God

(29) The next day, he (Yahya) saw ‘Isa coming towards him and said, “Behold! The lamb of God; the one who takes away the sin of the world! **(30)** This is the one concerning whom I said, ‘A man comes after me who was (created) before me, because he was favored over me.’ **(31)** And I didn’t know him (intimately as al-Masih), but I came baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.” **(32)** And Yahya witnessed saying, “I have seen the spirit descend as a dove from heaven and perch on him. **(33)** And I didn’t know him (intimately), but the One who sent me baptizing with water, *that* One said to me, ‘Upon whomever you see the spirit descending and remaining upon, this is the one who baptizes with the Ruh al-Qudus.⁵²⁶ **(34)** And I have seen and I have witnessed that this is the Son of God.

⁵²⁵ Samau’al al-Maghribi, *Ifham al-Yahud: Silencing the Jews*, translated by Moshe Perlmann (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1964), 81-85.

⁵²⁶ The baptism of the Holy Spirit (روح القدس) is to baptize with God’s Revelation, “the Baptism of Allah” (صبغة الله); cf. Q 2:138. Those baptized have been “marked” by God for blessed specification according to Suyuti; *Jalalayn* 2:138. The descent of the Spirit upon Christ and its “remaining” upon him indicates his rank over the Baptist and that Jesus is the one who mediates God’s Baptism by receiving God’s Revelation (*Injil*).

Jesus as Sacrificial Lamb

In John 1:26-27, the Baptist tells the messengers, “I baptize with water - (but) among you stands one whom you do not know well (οἶδατε); the one coming after me whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loosen!” I have already identified the Greek verbs γινώσκω and οἶδα as being cognates to the Arabic ‘a-l-m (*ya’lamu* [يعلم]) and ‘a-r-f (*ya’rifu* [يعرف]), the former denoting general knowledge or awareness of something (‘ilm) and the latter as knowing something intimately (*ma’rifah*). This difference between the two verbs is demonstrated by the fact that “the world” (ὁ κόσμος) did not “know” (ἐγνώ [aorist of γινώσκω]) Jesus *at all* (John 1:10), while the penitent Jews and messengers of the Temple at the Jordan River, while probably aware of Jesus’ existence, do not know (οἶδατε) him as well as they should; they may have ‘ilm of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, but do not seem to have *ma’rifah* of Jesus the Messiah, the “Son of God.” Thus just as Jesus acquaints Israel with the Father, John acquaints Israel with Christ. When the Baptist sees Jesus the next day he declares, “Behold! The lamb of God (ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ); the one who lifts up (αἶρων) the sin of the world” (John 1:29)! Many Muslim polemicists reject this statement outright on the grounds that it (seems to) contradict the message of the Baptist as captured by the Synoptic authors, namely, that it was every individual’s duty to “repent,” “bring forth fruits worthy of repentance,” and to not rely on lineage nor blood to provide salvation: “And don’t think to say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our Father.’” The Torah, Nebbim, and Qur’an confirm this theology respectively: Deuteronomy 24:7 says: “Every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (אִישׁ בְּחֻטְאוֹ יוּמָתוֹ); Ezekiel 18:20.9 says: “The wickedness of the wicked (רָשָׁעַת רָשָׁע) shall

be upon him, and the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him ([צדקת הצדיק]);”
 Jeremiah, after stating that the eating of sour grapes by fathers do not stain the teeth of
 their children, says, “Everyone shall die for his own sin” (31:30.1); Finally the Qur’an
 states: “No bearer or burdens can bear the burdens of another” ([6:164.5] ولا تزر وازرة
 وزر اخرى). This stress on personal responsibility before God is exemplified by the
 quatrain of the Hadrami Sufi Master and Renewer (مجدد) of the twelfth-century (*hijri*)
 Shaykh ‘Abdullah b. ‘Alawi al-Haddad (d. 1132/1720), himself a direct descendant of the
 Prophet Muhammad through al-Husayn b. ‘Ali (61/680).

By your life, a person is only the son of his religion, <i>La ‘amruka ma’l insanu illa ibnu dini-hi,</i>	- لعمرك ما الانسان إلا ابن دينه
So do not leave Taqwa (fear of God) leaning on lineage. <i>Fa laa tatruk al-taqwa ittikalan ‘ala’nasab.</i>	- فلا تترك التقوى إتكالاً على النسب
For verily Islam exalted Salman the Persian, <i>Fa qad rafa’a’l Islamu Salmana Farisin,</i>	- فقد رفع الاسلام سلمان فارس
And idolatry debased the noble-born Abu Lahab. ⁵²⁷ <i>Wa qad wadha’a’shirku al-hasiba Aba Lahab.</i>	- وقد وضع الشرك الحسيبا أبا لهب

The phrase “lamb of God” is a Hebraism that reminds the reader of Genesis 22, a
 passage known as “The Binding” (of Isaac) (Heb. *Ha ‘Aqaydah*, related to the Arabic
 ‘*aqidah* [عقيدة]). When Isaac inquires from his father, “Where is the lamb for the burnt
 offering?,” the latter replies, “God Himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering”
 (Genesis 22:7.9-22:8.1). Thus “the lamb (שֶׁה) of God (אֱלֹהִים)” was sacrificed in order to
 save the life of Abraham’s son, Isaac. In the same way, according to Caiaphas, “it is
 expedient that one man should die to spare (save) the nation” (John 11:50). Caiaphas

⁵²⁷ Quoted in Al-Habib ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Alawi al-Haddad al-Hadhrami al-Shaf’i, *Al-Fusul al-‘Ilmiyya wa’l Usul al-Hikmiyya* (Dar al-Hawiy, 1418/1998), 90.

fears for Israel's national existence; if Jesus is left alone, "all will believe in him, and the Romans will take away our place⁵²⁸ and nation" (John 11:48). Thus just as God saved Isaac, the progenitor of the Israelites and son of Abraham, by providing a sheep for the slaughter, He likewise saved Israel, His own "firstborn" (בְּנֵי בְכֹרִי [Exo. 4:22.5]) from national catastrophe by sacrificing His "unique Son" Jesus, the Messiah. By doing so, all Israelites in Palestine as well as in Diaspora (*gilyot*) via apostolic mission, were given a vital opportunity to believe in the Messiahship of Jesus and to recognize God's favor upon them by revealing the Gospel. *The mission of the Messiah was not (yet) military revolution but rather revolutionary Christology*. Nearly forty lunar years later, the same period of Israelite wandering in the wilderness, the almost complete rejection of Jesus by the Jews ended their nation's stay of execution, and God unleashed the Roman military machine to effectively end Judaism as they had known it. In this sense, Jesus is "the second Adam," but not necessarily as Paul sees it. "The similitude of Jesus is like that of Adam..., إن مثل عيسى عند الله كمثل آدم" (Q 3:59.1). According to the Qur'an, Satan was magnanimously reprieved by God until the Day of Judgment even though he refused to show obeisance to Adam, God's greatest kind of creation, His viceroy, and made in His "image" (صورة). In the same way, the Jews of Jesus' day, being "of their father the Devil" (John 8:44), that is to say, in imitation of Satan, will also be reprieved for forty years despite their refusal to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. It was the weighty responsibility of the Disciples of Jesus, as "Helpers of God" (أنصار الله [Q 61:14]), to announce the Gospel of Jesus to the Jews in Palestine and in Diaspora before the coming of the national catastrophe. Jesus' death had bought them some time, and his resurrection

⁵²⁸ "Place" is τόπος in the Greek, and a possible reference to the Temple.

assured them that he was indeed the Christ. This forty-year grace period is similar to the Jewish belief in the “High Holy Days” between *Rosh Ha Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*, during which time Jews are busy supplicating and asking forgiveness from God so that their names might be sealed in the Book of Life. To put in in Islamic terms, they make *du’a* so that calamities (بلاء) written upon the “suspended apportionment” (تقدير معلق) may be removed and solidified in the “sealed apportionment” (تقدير مبرم).

The Qur’an seems to refer to the destruction of the second temple in Q 17:7 when it states that the enemies of the Jews “entered the Temple (Ar. مسجد),” and “utterly laid all to waste” (لَيَتَبَرُوا مَا عَلَوْا تَتَبِيرًا). Ibn ‘Abbas identified the leader of the enemy army as “Titus, the son of Vespasian.”⁵²⁹ Jesus, however, does not die for anyone’s sins; there is no vicarious atonement. Israel’s sacrifices of sheep and goats were only outward (ظاهري) expressions of what should have been happening inward (باطني), namely, repentance (Heb. תשובה; Arab. توبة; Gr. μετάνοια), from a root meaning “to turn/reorient.” The actions of Jesus were meant to set a virtuous example (أسوة حسنة); all believers in Jesus must be willing to give their lives for their faith and for the sake of others. This is the greatest manifestation of *ithar* (selflessness), the highly-praised Sufi virtue mentioned earlier. Thus at the heart of Jesus’ Gospel message we find him saying, “A greater love than this no one has; that he lay down his life for the sake of his friends” (μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῇ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ [John 15:13]). Jesus is a “savior” (σωτήρ) only in the sense that he postponed his nation’s destruction, makes people conscious of their sin, and teaches them how to deal with overcoming their sinful states. No Gospel better highlights this aspect of Jesus’ soteriological teaching than

⁵²⁹ *Tanwir al-Miqbas*, Q 17:7.

the Gospel of Luke. In the Prodigal Son (ch. 15) of Luke's "travel narrative," for instance, the reader/listener must see himself as sinful "son" (عبد، غلام); when he (re)turns, that is to say, "(re)orients" himself towards his "Father" (رب), He welcomes him with open arms - "Verily He is Oft-Forgiving (توابا)" (Q 110:3.9)! The entire pericope is about repentance. The Matthean Jesus, quoting Hosea 6:6.1, says: "I require mercy, not sacrifice" (כִּי הִסְדִּד הַפָּצְתִּי וְלֹא-נִבַּח וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים מַעֲלֹות) ... for I did not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to *repentance*" (Matt. 9:13).

Therefore, there is no dissonance between the Baptist's message as recorded in the Synoptics and his declaration that Jesus is "the lamb of God" in the Gospel of John. Jesus Christ is the martyr *par excellence* who went willingly to his death in order to intercede (يشفع) on behalf of his nation, Israel, thus saving it from immediate divine wrath - "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45), thus fulfilling the haunting words of Isaiah 53 (which we will analyze later). Indeed, for Shiite exegete Tabataba'i in his *Al-Mizan*, the martyrdom (شهادة) of Imam Husayn served a similar purpose. Husayn gave his life to rouse the Muslim nation (أمة) from its heedlessness and complacency, and to set himself up as a great example of courage (شجاعة) and self-sacrifice (إيثار). The metamorphic aspect of Karbala is captured in the often repeated Shiite (and Sunnite) chant, "Every day is 'Aashura and every land in Karbala!" (كل يوم عاشورى و كل أرض كربلى). Tabataba'i even sees in Q 37:107, the "Qur'anic 'Aqaydah narrative" a typology of Husayn - "We ransomed him (apparently Ishmael) with a momentous sacrifice (ذبح عظيم)" - with the sacrifice pointing to Husayn.⁵³⁰ Although Shiite scholars, exegetes, and poets have historically been more inclined towards typology and esoterical exegesis (*ta'wil*)

⁵³⁰ *al-Mizan*, Q 37:107.

than their Sunni coreligionists, examples of mystical soteriological eulogy can be found in Sunni literature from time to time. Writing in Persian, Sunni-Sufi poet Mo'inuddin Chisti (d. 633/1236) eulogized Husayn by saying:

Husayn is King, Husayn is Emperor.
Shah hast Husayn, Padshah hast Husayn.
Husayn is Religion, Husayn in the Savior of Religion.
Deen hast Husayn, Deen panah hast Husayn.
He gave his head, not his hand into the hand of Yazid.
Sar daad, na daad dast dar dast-e Yazid.

Likewise, Jesus set a highly exalted and principled example for his Disciples and all those who came after him that any one of them may have to follow in his Master's footsteps and "take up his cross" (ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, Matt, 16:24; Mark 10:21; Luke 9:23) for "the disciple is never better than the Master" (οὐκ ἔστιν μαθητὴς ὑπὲρ τὸν διδάσκαλον [αὐτοῦ], Matt, 10:24; Luke 6:40). Those Jews who objected to the apparently oxymoronic idea of a "dead Messiah" were reminded by the apostles through mission that this was all according to God's plan, and that the definitive proof of Jesus' Messiahship (unique "sonship") was that he was raised from the dead by God a few days later. Even Paul appears to intimate this point, what Ehrman calls "exaltation Christology,"⁵³¹ in Romans 1:4: "And declared to be the Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by the *resurrection of the dead*" (τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν). It was now incumbent for all of the nation of Israel to accept Jesus as Christ. It would be in the second-coming (*Parousia*) of Jesus that he will manifest in his *jalali* (majestic) aspect and militarily engage with the enemies of God and defeat the Anti-Christ (Arab. *al-Dajjal*; Syr.

⁵³¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014) 211-246.

Daggal; Gr. ἀντίχριστος). According to *hadith* literature, Jesus will remain on earth yet another forty years in the capacity of a just ruler.⁵³² The Jews and Christians will be given an opportunity to hear from him directly and believe in his Messiahship - “And there is none of the People of the Book but that he must believe in him (Jesus) before his (the former’s) death” (Q 4:159.1.5). As for his first-coming, Jesus’ sacrifice of his life and subsequent post-mortem appearances opened up the ways and means for the Gospel to be heard all throughout the Mediterranean. The Jews were given forty years to accept Jesus as “lord (سيد) and savior (شافع),” after which time their cup of iniquity became full, culminating in the destruction of the second Temple, the “dress-rehearsal” of the Day of Judgment for the Jewish nation.

Affirming the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ will no doubt provoke calls of anathema against me by many of my fellow Muslims. In *their* understanding, I have breached a “definite proof text” (دليل قطعي) in which God declares: “... they did not kill him, nor crucify him, but it was made to appear so unto them” [Q 4:157.5]. This verse, however, must be read in the context of Jewish backslidings against God and His prophets. In my view, the Jews (Jewish authorities) managed to get Jesus on a cross, but he did *not* expire due to crucifixion - God saved him by seizing his soul - exactly as He said He would: “Behold! God said to Jesus, ‘I will *seize your soul* and raise you up unto myself” [Q 3:55.1]. There is a vast difference between a “dead Messiah” and a Messiah killed directly by men; the latter is no Messiah at all, although his sufferings were *real*. Al-Suyuti explains *mutawaffika* as *qabidhuka* (قابضك), meaning “the seizer of you.” Pickthall, Yusuf ‘Ali, and Shakir

⁵³² *Hadith* of Muslim.

translate respectively *mutawaffika* as: “I am gathering thee;” “I will take thee;” “I will terminate the period of your stay on earth.” It seems as if these translators are avoiding the obvious; God caused Jesus to die by taking his soul thus giving the *appearance* that Jesus died from injuries inflicted upon him at the behest of the Jewish temple authorities. Hence “Father into your hands I place my spirit” (Πάτερ εἰς χεῖράς σου παραθήσομαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου [Luke 23:46.5]). This may also help explain why Pilate “marveled” (ἐθαύμασεν) after learning that Jesus had apparently died after just a few hours on the cross (Mark 15:44). The word *mutawaffika* (مُتَوَفِّيكَ) in Q 3:55.1 is a form V active participle with a second-person masculine singular pronominal suffix, denoting Jesus. The form II verb (وفى) occurs eighteen times in the Qur’an and consistently means “to pay in full” or “to fulfill” as in: “And you will be paid in full (توفون) on the Day of Standing” (Q 3:185.5). The verb in form IV also occurs eighteen times in the Qur’an and consistently means “to fulfill” or “to keep one’s promise” as in: “And keep (fulfill, أوفوا) the Covenant! Indeed the Covenant will be asked about” (Q 17:34.9). The form V verb, however, occurs twenty-four times and *always* means “to pass away” or “die.” A few example will suffice: “And those of you who die (يُتَوَفَّوْنَ), and leave behind wives...” (Q 2:234.1); “Indeed those whom the angels take in death (تَوَفَّاهُمْ) while wronging themselves...” (Q 4:97.1); “Cause me to die (تَوَفَّنِي) as a Muslim, and join me to the righteous!” (Q 12:101.9); “Say: The angel of death will seize your souls (يَتَوَفَّاكُمْ)” (Q 32:11.1). Yet why is it that the form V active participle *mutawaffika* (مُتَوَفِّيكَ) in Q 3:55.1 is suddenly devoid of any explicit suggestion of death according to almost all translators? Of course the Qur’an also has Jesus say: “And peace be upon me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I am raised to life again” (وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُرْفَعُ)

أُبْعَثَ حَيًّا [Q 19:33]). Thus God kept His promise to the Messiah - “the Lord saves his Messiah” (הוֹשִׁיעַ יְהוָה מִשִּׁיחוֹ [Psalm 20:6]) - by rescuing him from being killed by his enemies in order to both fulfill the Scriptures and to render Jesus’ resurrection as a proof of his Christhood - “a great sign unto humanity” (آية للناس [Q 19:21.5]). In fact, the name of Jesus in Hebrew, *Jeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ), a contracted form of Joshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) according to the BDB,⁵³³ and rendered Ἰησοῦς in the LXX (the very name of Jesus in the New Testament), means “he is saved” according to the Lexicon Strong’s Concordance (no. 3442) while Joshua is defined as “whose help (salvation) is Jehovah” by Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible.⁵³⁴

The First Disciples

(35) The next day, Yahya was again standing with two of his disciples. (36) And having seen ‘Isa walking he said, “Behold! The lamb of God!” (37) And the two disciples heard him speaking and followed ‘Isa. (38) ‘Isa turned around and saw them following him and said, “Whom do you seek?” So they said to him, “Rabbi,” which means when translated: “Teacher,” “Where are you staying?” (39) He said to them, “Come and you will see.” Therefore, they came and saw where he was staying, and with him they stayed that night - it was about the tenth hour. (40) Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter was one of the two who had heard Yahya (speak) and followed him (‘Isa). (41) First he found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found al-Masih!” which is translated: “Christ.” (42) He (Andrew) led him (Simon) to ‘Isa. ‘Isa looked straight at him and said, “You are Simon, the son of John, (but) you will be called Cephas,” which means Peter.

Philip and Nathanael

(43) The next day, (‘Isa) decided to go into Galilee and find Philip. And ‘Isa said to him, “Follow me.” (44) Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. (45) Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “The one whom Musa wrote about in the Law, and the prophets (wrote about), we have found! ‘Isa the son of Yusuf from Nazareth!” (46) And Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good be from Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see!” (47) ‘Isa saw Nathanael coming towards him and said about him, “Look! Truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” (48) Nathanael said to him, “From where do you know me?” ‘Isa answered and said to him, “Prior to Philip calling you, I saw you while you were under the fig tree.” (49) Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of

⁵³³ BDB, 221 (Strong’s no. 3442).

⁵³⁴ The BDB gives the additional form *Y’shu’ah* (יְשׁוּעָה) and defines it as “salvation by God, primarily from external evils, but often with added spiritual idea” (447).

God, you are the King of Israel!" (50) 'Isa answered and said to him, "Because I said that I saw you under the fig tree do you believe? Greater things than these will you see! (51) And he ('Isa) said to him, "Indeed I say to you, you will see the heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Christ and his Spiritual Aspirants

As a great spiritual Master (مرشد), Jesus knows his Disciples (حواريون) - "And I know them" (καὶ γὰρ γινώσκω αὐτά, John 10:27.5) Andrew and the other disciple, who may very well be the Beloved Disciple (ὁν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς [whose first appearance is widely believed to be in John 13:23.9]), begin to follow Jesus and they stay the night with him; they are the "wanters" (مريدون), while Simon, Philip, and Nathanael are immediately accepted by Christ, and in Nathanael's case, *sought* by Christ himself; they are the "wanted" (مرادون). With respect to Simon, the sacred glance (نظرة) of Christ is bestowed upon him as well as the title of Cephas (Kepha), meaning "chosen stone," and related etymologically to the title of Muhammad, al-Mustafa (المصطفى), "the chosen one." Jesus' vision of Nathanael under the fig tree reminds the Muslim reader of Nestor the monk looking at the Prophet Muhammad as the latter sat beneath the tree in Bostra, Syria, and identifying him as the Messenger of God according to Ibn Sa'd's *Kitab al-Tabaqat*. This is called *firasa*, or intuition, a spiritual gift (charisma) that Ibn 'Ajibah describes as "a thought or inspiration (خاطر) that arises clearly in the heart and is seldom wrong if that heart be pure."⁵³⁵ The Prophet Muhammad said: "Beware of the believer's intuition, for he sees by the light of God."⁵³⁶ It was by *firasa*, or *basirah* (insight) rather than mere *basar* (eyesight), that the Beloved Disciple was able to declare about the man walking

⁵³⁵ Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa'iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 24.

⁵³⁶ اتقوا فراسة المؤمن فإنه ينظر بنور الله (Hadith of al-Tirmidhi).

upon the shore of the Sea of Galilee: “It is the lord!” (John 21:7.5). The fig is also one of the exalted “objects of oath” (مقسم به) of Surah 95: “By the fig...” (والتين [Q 95:1.1]), along with the olive, Sinai, and Mecca.

*God has given us a dark wine so potent that,
drinking it, we leave the two worlds.
God has put into the form of hashish a power
to deliver the taster from self-consciousness.
God has made sleep so that
it erases every thought.
God made Majnun love Layla so much that
just her dog would cause confusion in him.
There are thousands of wines
that can take over our minds.
Don't think all ecstasies
are the same!
Jesus was lost in his love for God.
His donkey was drunk with barley.
Drink from the presence of saints,
not from those other jars.
Every object, every being, is a jar full of delight.
Be a connoisseur, and taste with caution.
Any wine will get you high.
Judge like a king, and choose the purest,
the ones unadulterated with fear,
or some urgency about "what's needed."
Drink the wine that moves you as a camel moves when it's been untied,
and is just ambling about.*

- Rumi⁵³⁷

Chapter 2: The Wedding at Cana

(1) On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee and the mother of 'Isa was there. (2) 'Isa as well as his disciples were called to the wedding. (3) And when the wine ran out, the mother of 'Isa said to him, “They don't have wine.” (4) And 'Isa said to her, “What does that have to do with us, (dear) woman?”⁵³⁸ My hour has not yet come.” (5) His mother said to the servant, “Whatever he says to you, do it!” (6) There were six stone water jars standing there according to the purification (rituals) of the Jews, each one (able to) hold twenty or thirty gallons. (7) 'Isa said to them, “Fill the water jars with water!” And they filled them to the brim. (8) And he said to them, “Now draw (from them) and

⁵³⁷ “The Many Wines,” translated by Coleman Barks. *One-Handed Basket Weaving* (Mypop, 1992).

⁵³⁸ “What does that have to do with us?” (τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί). This is a common expression in Hebrew and Arabic; cf. 1 Kings 17:18 where the woman says to Elijah according to the LXX: τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί (מַה־לִּי וְלָךְ); and “What have I got to do with the world?” (مالي وللدنيا) *Hadith* of Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad.

carry (it) to the master of the feast; so they carried (it). (9) And as the master of feast tasted the water, having become wine, he did not know where it came from, but the servants who had drawn the water knew; the master of feast called the bridegroom (10) and said to him, "Every man first brings the good wine and when people get drunk, then (brings) the worse; but you have kept the good wine until now!" (11) This beginning of signs 'Isa did in Cana of Galilee and he revealed his glory (sacred teaching and example), and his disciples believed in him. (12) After this, he ('Isa), and his mother, brothers, and disciples went down to Capernaum, but (only) stayed there a few days.

*Indubitably no man is born fatherless;
Only one Jesus exists in the world.
- Shabestari⁵³⁹*

Christ as Bridegroom

Jesus' first miracle, and "beginning of signs" (τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων [John 2:11.1]), occurred in Cana of Galilee when he turned water into wine. Trinitarian exegetes see the miracle as a foreshadowing of the Cross, which I do not necessarily disagree with. Schnelle says for example: "The theology of the cross (always hovering in the background) fills up the meaning of the wine miracle..."⁵⁴⁰ Many of these exegetes cite John 19:34.9: "immediately there came blood and water," with wine being a vital ingredient of the Eucharist in which its essence *transubstantiates* into the blood of Christ while its accidents remain as wine during Mass. As in the Prologue, Jesus is placed in juxtaposition with Moses by the Johannine author although the comparison here is subtler, with the former being an antitype of sorts of the latter. Thus while Moses was able to change the very essence and accidents of the waters of the Nile into blood to be a *plague* against Egypt (Exo. 7:14-15), "the first plague," Jesus changes water into wine, blood essentially, to be a *blessing* for all of Israel, "the first sign." But is there another

⁵³⁹ Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, (London: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1983), 19.

⁵⁴⁰ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 696.

way of understanding the miracle from an Islamic theo-mystical perspective? I agree with mainstream Christian exegetes that the Johannine author is engaging in intertextuality with the Torah and has Moses in mind while writing. Just as the ancient Israelites crossed over the Sea of Reeds (Psalm 136:13 [Gr. LXX: ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν; Heb. Tanakh: יַם־סוּף])⁵⁴¹ to escape bondage and oppression and come into freedom and grace, to use explicitly Pauline language, it is Jesus at Cana (Gr. Κανὰ; Heb. קַנָּה), “the Place of Reeds,” who is a means by which the Israelites move from the watered-down blandness of the Mosaic commandments and proscriptions into the sweetness (طعمة) of the Gospel message; a message that ultimately will lead one to an intoxicating love of God known as *sukr* to the Sufis. In *Logion* 13 of the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says, “Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring which I have measured out.”⁵⁴² This is not to say that the law is null and void. The law (*shari’ah*) is absolutely necessary, just as water is vital to life. Jesus, however, using the law as both basis and means offers his followers actualization (تحقيق) of their faith, or what the Prophet Muhammad referred to as “tasting” (ذوق) one’s faith. Thus Jesus Christ, like Khidr before him, is presented as a Mosaic antithesis who merges “the two seas” (Q 18:60.5) of *shari’ah*, represented by the Sea of Reeds, and *haqiqah* (spiritual reality), represented by Cana, near the Sea of Galilee.

⁵⁴¹ The Hebrew יַם־סוּף translated “Reeds” is of uncertain origin according to *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon*. Interestingly, the exact letters (*samek, vav, peh*) spell “suf” (wool [صوف]) in Arabic (*sad, waw, fa*), the word from which Sufi (صوفي) is derived. On the level of *ta’wil*, the Sufi must take his *tariqah* across the sea of *shari’ah* with the guidance of a Master and trust (*tawakkul*) in God so that the waves of his egoistic cravings will not derail nor drown him.

⁵⁴² See: John W. Coakley & Andrea Sterk, *Readings in World Christian History, Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (New York: Orbis, 2004), 5-12.

After the miracle, the master of the feast complained to the bridegroom saying, “Every man first brings the good wine and when people get drunk, then (brings) the worse; but you have kept the good wine until now!” (Πᾶς ἄνθρωπος πρῶτον τὸν καλὸν οἶνον τίθησιν καὶ ὅταν μεθυσθῶσιν τότε τὸν ἐλάσσω: σὺ τετήρηκας τὸν καλὸν οἶνον ἕως ἄρτι [John 2:10]). Jesus Christ was the ultimate (last) Messenger of God to the children of Israel and His penultimate Messenger overall. As Messiah, he possesses the highest rank of any Israelite prophet that preceded him; God had “saved the best for last.” The significance of a wedding is made clear when we reflect upon the objective of the Gospel. The *Injil* proclaims the good news (بشرى) of God’s immanence (معية) to His creation and provides humanity with a spiritual path (طريقة). The *telos* of the mystical path ends in mystical union (جمع) with God. The closest analogy of the Divine-human unitive experience and its unfathomable ecstasy (وجد) is the act of human love-making (جماع). Just as the bride and bridegroom “come together” and become *as if* “one flesh” (כֶּשֶׁר אֶחָד) [Gen. 2:24.9]), so God and the mystic become united in an incomprehensible way in which duality *seems* to vanish.

The description of the miracle itself has deep symbolic and mystical meanings. Jesus tells the servants to fill “six waterpots of stone” (ὕδρια λίθιναι ἕξ) and then to draw from the water, now wine, in order for the master of the feast to “taste” (γεύομαι) it - to taste the sweetness of faith which Jesus offers. Rumi and Ibn al-Farid, in his (the latter’s) “wine ode” (*al-khamriyya*), often times speak of wine (*al-khamra*) and intoxication (*sukr*) as a similitude for the love of God. Ibn ‘Ajibah mentions: “It has also been said that the cup is the shaykh’s heart; the hearts of spiritual teachers are cups filled with this wine

which they give to all who sit with them and love them.”⁵⁴³ Christ is such a Shaykh who gives his lovers drinks of wine leading to intoxicating union. Ibn ‘Ajibah also quotes Ibn Mashish who said: “The wine of love (شراب المحبة) is an intermingling of Qualities (الأوصاف) with qualities, Character (الأخلاق) with character, Lights (الأنوار) with lights, Names (الأسماء) with names, Attributes (النعوت) with attributes, and Actions (الأفعال) with actions.”⁵⁴⁴ For the evangelist, the “good wine” (καλὸν οἶνον) of Christ, his teaching the way to union, is contrasted with earthly wine that leads to an inferior intoxication, as al-Shushtari said: “Earthly wine falls short of my wine: my wine is eternal (خمرها دون خمري).”⁵⁴⁵ On the brink of his death, Christ’s longing (*shawq*) to be with God as well as his ardor (*ishtiyaq*) are revealed. Ibn ‘Ajibah says: “While longing ends with vision and encounter, ardor is without end.”⁵⁴⁶ Thus Christ can never truly be quenched (*rayy*), and as al-Qushayri said, “Whoever’s love is strong will drink *eternally*.”⁵⁴⁷ As the poet said, “Though I have drunk of love, cup after cup, the wine still flows and my thirst is yet unquenched (شربت الحب كأسا بعد كأسا فما نفذ الشراب ولا رويت).”⁵⁴⁸ Hence “I am thirsty (Διψῶ)” (John 19:28.9), then the receiving of the sour wine (ὄξος) (John 19:29.1).

The Johannine author also sees Jesus as an extension of his Father: Πολλὰ καλὰ ἔργα ἔδειξα ὑμῖν ἐκ τοῦ πατρός μου (“Many good works I have shown you from my Father” [John 10:32.5]). Jesus as a sanctified and perfected extension of God Himself is indicated by Ibn al-‘Arabi who draws a distinction between John the Baptist, whose very name *Yayha*, (يحيى) meaning “he lives,” indicates that his father Zakariyya lives on

⁵⁴³ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 68.

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁴⁸ *ibid.*

through his literally begotten son, and Jesus, “the savior” (according to Matthew’s translation [Matt. 1:21]), who lives, acts, and speaks as “God,” being His spiritually begotten Son. In fact, four out of the five great “prophets of resolve” (أولوا العزم) were not raised by their earthly fathers (Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad), but were, in a sense “adopted” by God Himself - they possess what the Sufis call “lordly rearing” (تربية ربانية). Ibn al-’Arabi points out that John was blessed by God when the latter spoke of him in the third person, while Jesus, indicating his total annihilation in God’s character, blesses *himself* with the same formula but in the first person. When Christ speaks and acts, it is “as if” (*ka-anna*) God is speaking and acting. Ibn al-’Arabi says, “This matter has led certain people to speak of incarnation and to say that, in reviving the dead, his is God. Therefore, they are called unbelievers (concealers), being a form of concealment, since they conceal (كفروا) God, Who in reality revives the dead, in the human form of Jesus.”⁵⁴⁹ Thus “Oneness of Existence” (وحدة الوجود) means that our divinized souls, having experienced true theophany at the end of the spiritual path, become the “eyes, ears, and hands” of God; that is to say, God will act directly through us in a way that is totally pleasing to Him. And Jesus is the model for those who wish to have direct experience with God, since he was created in the womb of Mary *directly* without any male intervention. Ibn al-’Arabi cites the story of Abu Yazid al-Bistami who blew on an ant he had killed and it came back to life. He says, “At that moment he knew Who it was that blew, so he blew (into it). In that respect he was like Jesus.”⁵⁵⁰ As previously mentioned, such unity (وحدة) is described by the bishop of Antioch, Psilanthropist, and Modal Monarchist Paul of Samosata (d. 275 CE), as a “unity of will and energy

⁵⁴⁹ Muhyiddin Ibn Al-’Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, translated by R.W.J. Austin, 177.

⁵⁵⁰ *ibid*, 179.

(activity)”... a unity and “sameness of approval and well-pleasingness,” produced by “an attitude of love.”⁵⁵¹ The six stone pots represent the six days of creation; they are the “empty (בְּהוֹרֵ) earth (אֶרֶץ)” of Genesis 1:2. Just as the literal Spirit of God (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים) hovered over the waters, the metaphorical Spirit of God (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים), Jesus Christ, engages the water. God created and Jesus “created.” In the Prologue, “the Logos is presented as the creator of the world, although this is not necessarily an assertion of full deity.”⁵⁵² “God purified him in body and made him transcendent in the Spirit, making him like Himself in creating.”⁵⁵³ In fact, the Qur’an quotes Jesus saying, “I create (اَخْلُقُ) ... out of (the) clay (الطين),” and God says, “I created (اَخْلَقْتُ)... out of clay (طين).” The latter “clay,” being anarthrous, however, denoting God’s absolute power to create from *any* clay as well as to create *ex nihilo* (عَدَمٍ مِنْ), while Jesus created, or rather “formed” birds from *certain* clay “by God’s leave” (بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ) and breathed unto them. “Al-Ash’ari, one of the most representative theologians of mainstream Sunni orthodoxy, could also be referred to as he denies man’s agency and calls his actions ‘creations of God’... humans in some way acquire a divine status but themselves become extinct and disappear.”⁵⁵⁴ Similarly, while God gave life to all, Jesus gives his followers eternal life by being the means of their salvation (John 10:28-29); he is one with the Father (John 10:30). In this respect, Noah, Moses, Abraham, and Muhammad were also one with the Father.

⁵⁵¹ *Discourses to Sabinus*, IV.

⁵⁵² Paul N. Anderson, “On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John’s Christological Tensions,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 330.

⁵⁵³ Muhyiddin Ibn Al-‘Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, translated by R.W.J. Austin, 177.

⁵⁵⁴ Yahya Michot, “Revelation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 187.

The Cleansing of the Temple

(13) The Passover of the Jews was near so 'Isa went up into Jerusalem. (14) And he found in the Temple people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and also (found) the money changers sitting. (15) And he made a whip of rope and drove out the sheep and the oxen from the Temple, and spilled out the coins of the changers and overturned (their) tables. (16) And to those who were selling doves, he said, "Take these things out of here! Don't turn the House of my Father into a marketplace!" (17) His disciples remembered that it is written, "The zeal of My House will consume Me!" (18) Then the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign are you going to show us because you do these things?" (19) 'Isa answered and said to them, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (20) Therefore, the Jews said, "It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you will raise it up in three days?!" (21) But he was speaking about the Temple of his body. (22) When he was raised from the dead his disciples remembered that he said this and they believed both the Scripture and the statement (word) which 'Isa said.

The Beginning of the Spiritual Path

The tripartite mystical path is laid out in "the first sign" of John 2, and the subsequent cleansing of the Temple is a powerful metaphor for the first stage. These stages are: 1) *takhliyya* (تخلية): emptying (Gr. *catharsis*; Lat. *via purgativa*); 2) *tahliyya* (تحلية): ornamenting (Gr. *theoria*; Lat. *via contemplativa*; 3) *tajliyya* (تجلية): theophany/divinization / transfiguration (Gr. *theosis*; Lat. *via illuminativa*). If we want to experience the ecstasy of the union of the bride with the bridegroom, *jima'* as a metaphor for *jama'*, we must empty ourselves of all spiritual diseases (أمراض) and vices (عيوب); we must be like empty earthen vessels ready to receive grace from the Master (مرشد). Secondly, we must have contact (صحبة) with the spiritual Master, as the Disciples did who were also invited to the wedding, and ornament (تخلق) ourselves with virtue (فضل) and sound grounding in the *shari'ah* (water). Finally, when we reach the "merging of the two seas" (مجمع البحرين [Q 18:60.5]), we experience our faith and taste its sweetness, and being inebriated with the love of God we become lordly (ربانيون) in the exercise of our agency.

The two seas of *lahut* and *nasut seem* to merge to an onlooker, while in reality, “between the two there is a barrier (برزخ) which they do not transgress” (Q 55:20).⁵⁵⁵ Like the water pots we were emptied (*takhliyya*), filled (*tahliyya*), and transformed (*tajliyya*), having realized the perfection of human existence on earth; we were made into the “image of God.”

The Johannine author, in contrast to the Synoptic evangelists, moves the “Cleansing of the Temple” to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry to indicate the incumbency of *takhliyya* as the first step of the mystical path. For the uninitiated, Jesus attacks the Temple because he wants political revolution and national liberation. However, the word for temple in Hebrew, *haykal* (הֵיכָל), could also refer to the “body.”⁵⁵⁶ Jesus’ symbolic iconoclastic action of driving out the money and animals represents our need to drive out our idols, our love of money (حب المال) and animalistic qualities (صفات حيوانية) from our bodies, from ourselves. To put things in Ghazalian terms, the emotive “dog” (كلب) and carnal “pig” (خنزير) qualities of our “selves” (نفوس) must be purged through spiritual exercise (رياضة).⁵⁵⁷ Jesus indicates the reality of these harmful animalistic qualities in all

⁵⁵⁵ See: Marcia Hermansen, “Fana’ fi al-Rasul: The Utmost Degree of Devotion to the Prophet Muhammad,” in *Sufi Illuminations: A Journal Devoted to the Study of Islam and Sufism*, Vol. 4 No. 1 Spring 2008, chief ed. Redzic, 77-78.

⁵⁵⁶ “The Hebrew term *hekhal* is related to the Arabic *haykal*. Louis Massignon interprets it both as “the outer casing, the body” (equating thereby *jism*...) and as a ‘temple, residence...’” See: Algis Uzdavinys, *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism* (London: The Matheson Trust, 2011), 120. Nasr comments upon the title of Suhrawardi’s famous work *Hayakil al-Nur* (The Temples of Light) by saying: “The Arabic word *haykal* (pl. *hayakil*) here rendered as temple means also body; the title refers to the symbolism of the body as the temple in what is present the light of God.” See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 187. In Zech 6:12, we are told: “Behold! A man whose title is ‘Branch’ (צֶמַח) will branch out from his place and build the Temple (הֵיכָל) of the Lord.” “The Messiah is elliptically called צֶמַח branch, or offspring, i.e. of God” (Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon). Gesenius also mentions that Nazareth and Nazarene may be related to *netzer*, meaning “sprout, shoot,” which seems synonymous to *tsemach* (צֶמַח). Thus a prophecy could be revealed here that “a Nazarene will build the Temple,” that is, the Temple of his body (John 2:19).

⁵⁵⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Sharh ‘Aja’ib al-Qalb, The Marvels of the Heart*. Translated by Walter James Skellie (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010), 19.

people, *not* just in reference to Gentiles, when he says, “Do not give to dogs (κυσίν) what is holy... do not cast your pearls to the pigs (χοίρων)” (Matt. 7:6.1.5). Askari then sees in the following verse, Matthew 7:7, the three stages of the mystical path leading to “divinization” (*theosis*); Αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν, ζητεῖτε καὶ εὕρήσετε, κρούετε καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν (*Ask*, and it will be given to you; *seek*, and you will find; *knock*, and it will be opened to you).⁵⁵⁸

When pressed by temple authorities for a “sign” Jesus responds, “Destroy this temple (body) and in three days and will raise it” (Λύσατε τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις ἐγερῶ αὐτόν [John 2:19.5.9]). The Jews misunderstood this saying and it was only after his resurrection that the Disciples were able to comprehend its true significance. According to Coloe, Jesus is the new Temple;⁵⁵⁹ the roving tabernacle (*mishkan*) that houses the indwelling of God’s presence (*kavod*). Christ is the incarnated manifestation of the mercy, love, and wrath of God. The irony about the exchange of Jesus with the Jewish authorities is that due to the latter’s full or partial rejection of the former, God would allow the Romans to destroy the actual building of the Temple some forty years later. Therefore, there is a double element of prophecy in the words of Jesus. But Jesus is the new “House of the Father,” and a house has a family; thus just as the Jews used to enter the Temple in order to worship God, all believers must know come to Christ, the new Temple, and worship God *through* him, and in doing so they might become members of “God’s Family” (*familia dei*)⁵⁶⁰ - his “adopted” sons and daughters.

⁵⁵⁸ Hasan Askari, *Spiritual Quest: An Inter-religious Dimension* (Pudsey, W. Yorks: Seven Mirrors Publishing House, 1991), 93-96.

⁵⁵⁹ Mary L. Coloe, “Raising the Johannine Temple (John 19.19-37),” in *Australian Biblical Review* 28 (2000): 47-58.

⁵⁶⁰ This is Schnelle’s phrase. See: Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 661.

Unlike Coloe and all Trinitarian exegetes, however, I do not see the necessity of taking these ideas literally and thus deifying Christ as being “essentially” or “ontologically” God. Moses and Muhammad were also incarnated manifestations of God’s attributes. Time and again, Schnelle while commenting on: the works of the Son in relational to the Father; Jesus as “the Sent One;” Jesus’ self-proclamations using “I am;” Jesus as “Son of God;” Jesus as “the Holy One of God;” and Jesus’ “statements of reciprocal immanence,”⁵⁶¹ Schnelle claims respectively: “The Son shares the Father’s essential being,”⁵⁶² “it assumes the preexistence and incarnation of the Son;”⁵⁶³ “[Jesus] manifests himself before the hearers/readers of the Gospel as God;”⁵⁶⁴ “Jesus participates in the innermost essence of God;”⁵⁶⁵ and “The Son is much more than the agent of the Father; he not only participates in the essential being of the Father but is of the same essential being as the Father.”⁵⁶⁶ He continues: “In the Gospel of John, we *must* speak of a unity of essential being between Father and Son”⁵⁶⁷ (emphasis mine). Schnelle’s insistence that John is speaking of *homoousion* union summarily ignores Jesus’ very Jewish contexts, whether indigenously Palestinian or Hellenistic (diasporic), and thus constitutes a *non-sequitur* anachronistic argument; for the Rabbis in Palestine, community at Qumran, or Philo of Alexandria, nothing and no one dwelling in creation *is* the One *who is* (ὁ ὢν).

⁵⁶¹ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 710.

⁵⁶² *ibid*, 663.

⁵⁶³ *ibid*, 682.

⁵⁶⁴ *ibid*, 686.

⁵⁶⁵ *ibid*, 692.

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid*, 711.

⁵⁶⁷ *ibid*.

Jesus knows human nature

(23) While he was in Jerusalem during the festival of the Passover, many believed in his name, seeing the signs which he was doing. (24) But 'Isa did not entrust himself to them because he knew human nature. (25) And he had no need for anyone to witness concerning humanity, for he (already) knew what was in humanity.

Chapter Four: From Nicodemus in the Dark to the Bread of Life (3:1-6:71)

'Isa and Nicodemus: The Role of the Messiah in his First-Coming

Chapter Three: (1) There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, (who was) a Jewish ruler. (2) He came to him ('Isa) at *night* and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from Allah, for no one is able to do these signs which you do unless Allah is with him."⁵⁶⁸ (3) 'Isa answered and said to him, "Indeed I say to you: Unless someone is born again (from above), he is not able to see the kingdom of Allah." (4) Nicodemus said to him, "How can a person be born while he is old; he can't enter into the womb of his mother a second time and be born, right?" (5) 'Isa answered, "Indeed I say to you: Unless someone is born from water and spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of Allah. (6) The one born of flesh is flesh, and the one born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Don't be surprised because I said to you it is necessary to be born again (from above), (8) The wind blows where it wants, and its sound you hear, but you don't know where it comes from and where it goes; thus is everyone born of the Spirit." (9) Nicodemus answered and said to him, "How can these things be?" (10) 'Isa answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you don't know anything about these things?! (11) Indeed I say to you: Of what we know we speak, and to what we have seen we bear witness, but our witness you do not receive. (12) If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (13) And no one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man. (14) And as Musa lifted up the snake in the desert, likewise it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up, (15) so that everyone believing in him might have eternal life. (16) For Allah loved the world (indiscriminately, *cosmo-agapically*) in such a way that he gave His unique Son (*the* Messiah), so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life. (17) For Allah did not send His Son into the world (this time), to condemn the world,⁵⁶⁹ but so the world might be saved *through* him. (18) The one who believes in him is not condemned, but the one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name⁵⁷⁰ of the unique Son of Allah. (19) And this is the (reason

⁵⁶⁸ "Allah is with him" (ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτοῦ). Is this an allusion to Isaiah 7:14 partially quoted by Matthew 1:23.9 (μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός) and thus a reference to Jesus' virgin birth?

⁵⁶⁹ "Condemn the world," meaning "to judge;" the Messiah is not a *sopher* (judge) in his first coming since he does not possess recognized juristic authority among the Jews.

⁵⁷⁰ To believe in the "name" (ὄνομα) of Jesus means to believe in his title, "the Messiah/Christ." If we revisit Matthew 1:23, we are told that the son of the virgin will bear the "name" Immanuel ("God is with us" and/or "a god is with us"), while the actual name of her son was "Jesus," not Immanuel. Immanuel is rather his title or one of his exalted attributes (صفات).

for the) judgment: That the light has come into the world but men loved⁵⁷¹ the darkness rather than the light - for their works were evil. (20) For everyone who practices wickedness hates the light and does not come to the light so that his works might not be exposed. (21) But the one who does the truth comes to the light, so that his works might become manifest because in God they have been done.

*The hermitage of Jesus
Is the Sufi's table spread;
Take heed, O sick one,
Never forsake this doorway.
- Rumi, Mathnawi (III:298)⁵⁷²*

The Darkness and the Light

John 3 begins with the inspired evangelist dabbling in one his signature motifs throughout the Gospel: the “duality” of light vs. darkness/ day vs. night/ good vs. evil. Here again we notice an affinity between the community at Qumran, the Essenes, and John. Charlesworth says: “John probably borrowed some of his dualistic terminology and mythology from 1QS 3:13-4:26,”⁵⁷³ i.e. the Essene *Community Rule*. The significance of this will be further explored in Chapter Seven of the present work, *Deo volente*. When the Pharisee Nicodemus comes to Jesus, he walks “at night” (νυκτός), and “if someone should walk during the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him” (John 11:10). The Qur’an says, “Fear God and believe in His Messenger... in order that He make for you a light with which you will walk” (يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ بِهِ [Q 57:28.5]). Nicodemus represents, in general terms, “the Jew” who wishes to engage the spiritual path (طريقة) without belief in Jesus, God’s Messenger; he wishes to enter “pen of the sheep” (τὴν

⁵⁷¹ This is the opposite of *Agapistis* not *Cosmo-agapis*; it is a deliberate love of evil and sin while knowingly rejecting or hating the truth (*kufi*). The opposite of *Cosmo-agapis* is to hate all indiscriminately, while true *cosmo-agapis* is love all indiscriminately but with a realization that there is truth and falsehood in the world.

⁵⁷² Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 7.

⁵⁷³ James H. Charlesworth, “A Critical Comparison of the Dualism in 1QS 3:13-4:26 and the ‘Dualism’ Contained in the Gospel of John,” in *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1972), 104.

αὐλὴν τῶν προβάτων) through some other way, and not through Christ, who is the door (θύρα) of the sheep (John 10:9), as well as the “good shepherd” (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός [John 10:11.1]). It is Christ who is the *Via ad Deum* (طريقة إلى الله), and the one through whom God “brings you out from the darkness into the light” (لِيُخْرِجَكُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ) [Q 33:43.5]). Christ makes a stunning statement later in the Gospel that the one who “climbs up by another way” (ἀναβαίνων ἀλλαχόθεν) is “a thief and a robber” (κλέπτης ἐστὶν καὶ ληστής). With a brilliant stroke of Johannine “multiple-meaning,” Nicodemus also foreshadows the actions of Judas (*Yehudah*, literally “the Jew”) Iscariot, who having taken the piece of bread from Christ during the last supper, “left immediately” (εὐθέως ἐξῆλθεν) - “and it was night” (ἦν δὲ νύξ [13:30]). We are also told that Judas was quite literally a “thief” who used to steal from the Disciples’ moneybag (12:6), and while the thief steals with stealth, the robber plunders openly.⁵⁷⁴ Thus Judas represents the archetypal Jewish⁵⁷⁵ adversary of Jesus who works in the shadows, with deceit, and even with Pagans,⁵⁷⁶ in order to bring about the messianic age, while Barabbas, a zealous

⁵⁷⁴ See: C.K., Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 305.

⁵⁷⁵ Let us not forget that Jesus, his mother, and his disciples were Jews, yet the evangelist consistently refers to Jewish opponents as “the Jews” in what *seems* to be a “litany of hate” See: Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 4. Some see in this appellation of Jesus’ opponents an anachronism that demonstrates the Gospel’s much later date of authorship. I take the position of Moloney, namely, that “the Jews” in the Gospel of John are the Jewish legal authorities who exhibit a “closed-system” mentality; they are arrogant, sanctimonious, and stubborn in their ways. Ironically, Moloney mentions that Bultmann comes very close to saying that “the Jews” of his day were the Nazis. See: Francis J. Moloney S.D.B., *Sacra Pagina, The Gospel of John* (Collegeville: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 1998), 9-10, 274-288. Cf. Stephen Motyer, “Bridging the Gap: How Might the Fourth Gospel Help Us Cope with the Legacy of Christianity’s Exclusive Claim over Judaism” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 143-167. Motyer says paraphrasing Pippin: “Translations which give ‘the Jews’ as the equivalent of hoi Ioudaioi are complicit in ‘a criminal act,’” 144; cf. Tina Pippin, “For Fear of the Jews’: Lying and Truth-Telling in Translating the Gospel of John,” *Semeia* 76 (1996): 81-97, citing p. 89.

⁵⁷⁶ We are told in John 18:3.1, that Judas, “having taken (with him) the detachment of (Roman) soldiers serving in that region... (ὁ οὖν Ἰούδας λαβὼν τὴν σπεῖραν...) arrived at the garden to betray his Master. Thayer defines σπεῖραν as a “military cohort” or “legionaries” while Strong’s definition is “a Roman military cohort.” According to BDAG: “cohort, the tenth part of a legion” (761). The UBS 4th ed. opts for “group of (Roman) soldiers.”

insurrectionist and apparent messianic pretender, wants to bring about the messianic age through violence; thus he is called a robber (ληστής). Both men wish to “climb up by another way,” but these ways are unacceptable to God.

“Walking” the Spiritual Path

“Walking” is one of the most prevalent Johannine themes in the Book of Signs as the author uses the verb περιπατέω eighteen times in the first twelve chapters of the Gospel. My contention is that in true Johannine style, there exists a subtlety (لطيفة) to what it means for Jesus and his Disciples to “walk,” that is beyond the obvious or apparent (ظاهري) meaning of physical motion upon one’s feet. According to Thayer, the verb περιπατέω also carries meanings of “progression” and “to conduct one’s self.” The BDAG also gives similar meanings but restricts this figurative usage to Paul and “two small Johannine letters,”⁵⁷⁷ although confirms its “symbolical” usage in John 8:12 and 12:35.⁵⁷⁸ Hebraistically, the verb “to walk” (הלך), related to *halakhah* (הלכה), Jewish *shari’ah*, also means “to live” according to the Law of God. The Lord commands both Abraham and Solomon to “walk before me” (הלך לפני) [Gen. 17:1; 1 Ki. 9:4; also see Ps. 56:13]. Additionally, “walking *with* (אִתְּ) God,” as opposed to “*before* (לְפָנֶיךָ) God” denotes either post-mortem (re)union with God, or as I contend, theositic mystical union with God in this world.

Genesis: 5:22: “And Enoch *walked with God*, after he begot Methuselah, for three-hundred years; and he begot sons and daughters.”

Genesis 5:24: “And Enoch *walked with God*, and he was not, for God took him.” As

⁵⁷⁷ “Live, conduct oneself” (BDAG, 649).

⁵⁷⁸ *ibid.*

stated earlier, the ego-self of Enoch was gone and he lived only for God.⁵⁷⁹

Genesis: 6:9.5.9: “And Noah was saintly/righteous (צדיק) and perfect/” divinized” (תמים) among his people; and Noah *walked with God*.” Noah was the most righteous human being on earth at this time; he was the *Qutb* (Axis) of the Saints (أولياء) of God.

Thus in the Gospel of John, “walking” is a cipher for teaching (تعليم) and learning (تعلم) the message of Christ, the Gospel, and embarking upon the spiritual path to mystical experience. The Disciples must first learn the Gospel and engage the path *with Christ* as their guide; this is the “journey *to Allah*” (إلى الله) - to walk *before* (פניה) God. Then in his “High Priestly Prayer,” (John 17), Jesus prays that the Disciples might achieve union with God, as he has; “The One who sent me is with me (John 8:29.1);” this is the “journey *in Allah*” (في الله) - to walk *with* (תא) God. The relationship between Johannine “walking” and teaching/learning the path is made clear by the fact that the verb περιπατέω does not appear even once in chapters 13-20⁵⁸⁰ (the Book of Glory), since John 12:49, the end of the Book of Signs, marks the end of the public ministry of Jesus Christ.

John 1:36: And having seen Jesus walking (περιπατοῦντι) he said, “Behold! The lamb of Allah!” Jesus has now begun his ministry.

John 5:8-9: “Jesus said to him, ‘Stand and take up your mattress, and walk (περιπάτει)!’ And immediately the man became healthy and took up his mattress and walked (περιεπάτει). And that day was the Sabbath.” Beneath the surface, Jesus is commanding the man to take the path and become his disciple. The man obeys him.

John 6:19: “Having rowed twenty-five or thirty stadions,⁵⁸¹ they saw Jesus walking (περιπατοῦντα) on the sea and getting close to the boat, so they were terrified.” Christ is the Master of the path.

⁵⁷⁹ It is related that a man once came to Abu Yazid al-Bistami and said to him, “I am looking for Abu Yazid.” Abu Yazid replied, “So am I.” The Sufis explain that Abu Yazid was in a state of *fana*’ at that moment - that he *was not*. On another occasion, a man knocked on his door to which he answered, “There is no one here but God!” See: Yahya Michot, “Revelation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 187.

⁵⁸⁰ The verb does appear in chapter 21 (v. 18), the possible appended Epilogue, but only once.

⁵⁸¹ Approximately three to four miles.

John 6:66: “Due to this, many of his disciples went back to ‘the things that they had left behind,’ and no longer walked (**περιεπάτουν**) with him (on the spiritual path).” They may have even apostated.

John 7:1: “After these things, Jesus walked (**περιεπάτει**) in Galilee; for he was not wanting to walk (**περιπατεῖν**) in Judea, because the Jewish authorities were seeking to kill him.” That is to say, Jesus *taught* in Galilee and was not wanting to *teach* in Judea.

John 8:12: “Jesus again spoke to them saying, ‘I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will not walk (**περιπατήσῃ**) in darkness, but will have the light of (eternal) life.’” To “walk in darkness” is to take a path to God that has no *tawfiq* (providence).

John 10:23: “while Jesus was walking (**περιεπάτει**) on Solomon’s porch in the Temple.” Jesus was *teaching* on Solomon’s porch.

John 11:9-10: “Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours in the day? If someone should walk (**περιπατήῃ**) during the day, he will not stumble, because the light of this world he sees. But if someone should walk (**περιπατήῃ**) during the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.’” Again we have the metaphor of “walking at night (in darkness).” Perhaps Christ is also prophesying his betrayal by Judas who “walks at night.”

John 11:54: “So Jesus no longer walked (**περιεπάτει**) openly among the Jewish authorities, but departed from there into the region near the desert, into a city called Ephraim, and remained there with the Disciples.” Jesus no longer *taught* in public.

John 12:35: “Walk (**περιπατετε**) while you have the light, so that the darkness will not overtake you. The one walking in the darkness has no idea where he is going (spiritually).”

Jesus said: ‘One cannot enter the spiritual world beyond the heavens and the earth, until one has been born again.’ - Hamadhani, *Tamhidat*, p. 12⁵⁸²

Born from Above

I agree with Coloe that when Jesus tells Nicodemus that it is necessary to be “born again (from above),” he is referring to becoming a “child” (τεκνον) of God through complete faith in Jesus Christ, “through the gift of the Spirit,⁵⁸³ and embarking upon the spiritual path. There is birth from “water” (ὕδωρ), meaning being born from one’s

⁵⁸² Quoted from Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 87.

⁵⁸³ Mary L. Coloe, P.B.V.M., *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (Collegeville: Michael Glazer, 2007), 76-77.

biological mother, and birth from the “Spirit,” meaning being “born” *again* from God, from above - to join the “Family of God” (أهل الله, *familia dei*). Everyone is born of water, but in order to come into the “kingdom of God,” one must also be born of the Spirit. Nicodemus makes the *common* mistake of taking Jesus’ words literally, and wonders how a grown man can re-enter the womb of his mother. It is important to note that Jesus expects Nicodemus, being a “teacher of Israel,” to “know these things” (ταῦτα οὐ γινώσκεις). Jesus is teaching *Judaism* and is offended when so-called Rabbis and Doctors of the Law make blatant errors when interpreting his sayings. Ghazali quite often quoted Christ in his *Revival* because, like Nicodemus, many of the ‘ulema of Ghazali's day were caught in the thicket of legalistic formalism, while Leaman says, “The solution was to be sought in a moral and spiritual *rebirth*”⁵⁸⁴ (emphasis mine). Indeed, an Alexandrian Jewish sage contemporary with Jesus named Philo was already speaking of “a second birth better than the first.”⁵⁸⁵ For Philo, this second birth means to become pure mind (*nous*) thus “conforming to the reality of the Logos, the Divine Mind.”⁵⁸⁶ As *nous*, “Moses did not have a mother (a material progenitor), but only a father (an intellectual progenitor), whom Philo identifies as God.”⁵⁸⁷

John 3:16: “Love”

“The unity between God and Jesus is thus a unity of love.”⁵⁸⁸ John 3:16 is indeed the theological crescendo of John 3. But before we can understand it accurately from a

⁵⁸⁴ Oliver Leaman, “The Developed *Kalam* Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 90.

⁵⁸⁵ *Questions on Exodus* (2:46).

⁵⁸⁶ Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 15-16.

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid*, 15; cf. *Leg.* 251; 3.225.

⁵⁸⁸ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 664.

Muslim lens, we must first define a few terms that are found in the verse. Although the majority of the early fathers (Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, and Augustine) as well as most modern scholars (Bernard, Moffatt, Bultmann, Barrett, and Brown to name a few) do not see a distinction between *agape* (ἀγάπη) and *philia* (φιλία) in the Gospel of John, in my view, like that of Origen from the ancients and Westcott from the moderns, there is indeed a nuanced distinction between the two terms that deserves some attention, especially if we are operating under the textually-affirming approach; namely that the Gospel of John was actually revealed by God to its author in *Greek*, hence the Greek term إنجيل. As we shall see, John quite often uses the *same* Greek word to convey a variety of meanings according to different contexts, so when he goes out of his way to use *different* words to denote apparent similarities, they are not being used synonymously. There are subtleties of meaning that must not escape us. God speaks precisely, and we must strive to understand Him as precisely as possible. A single Qur’anic example will suffice us for now: There are four Arabic words that are all quite often translated into English as the word “heart:” (*sadr* [صدر], *qalb* [قلب], *fu’ad* [فؤاد], and *lubb* [لب]). Thus the unspecialized reader of the Qur’an would likely fail to notice these terms as being the “four layers of the spiritual heart,” at least according to Abu’l Husayn al-Nuri (d. 294/907) in his *Stations of the Hearts (Maqamat al-Qulub)* and al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (d. 298/910). In Q 28:10, we are told that the mother of Moses (Jochebed [יִזְחָבֵד] in the Torah [Exo. 6:20]) felt a “void in her *heart*” upon casting her son into the Nile, and that “she was about to disclose his (case) had it not been that We strengthened her *heart*.” The first word translated “heart,” however, is *fu’ad* (فؤاد), and represents the seat of intimate knowledge of God. It is also the name of the spiritual heart when it acts with emotion, hence the

emotive or kindled heart. The latter word translated “heart” is *qalb* (قلب) and represents the seat of faith or *Iman* (إيمان).⁵⁸⁹ Thus when Jochebed cast her son into Nile, she felt that she had lost the source of her spiritual sustenance (مدد), similar to what a disciple might feel when his spiritual Master passes away; a spiritual “numbness” that leaves one emotionless. But God gave strength to her *qalb* by fortifying her *faith* in Him so that Jochebed found comfort in her life through her trust (توكل) in God.

We can identify four kinds of love in the Gospel of John that correspond to four levels. We should know also that when Christ loves someone it is the *same* as God loving that individual because the love of the *Ahl Allah* (*familia dei*) is in reality the love of Allah. Similarly, love *for* Christ is the same as love for God, as long as one believes in Jesus’ Christhood.

Love of God for man and man for God in John:

Level I: General Love (*Cosmo-agapsis*): This describes the indiscriminate love (mercy [رحمة]) of God toward Jew and Gentile alike, as in John 3:16; denoted by the word *agape* in John. I agree with Schnelle who says: “[agape] points to the love of God for the whole world;”⁵⁹⁰ it is His “universal love.”⁵⁹¹ This corresponds to the Name of God *al-Rahman* (الرحمن) in the Qur’an, the first attribute (صفة) of Allah in the *Basmala* (بسملة) which I would translate, “In the Name of God, the Indiscriminately Compassionate...”

⁵⁸⁹ Cf. Buehler, “Sufism: A Holistic Approach to Islam” in *Sufi Illuminations: A Journal Devoted to the Study of Islam and Sufism*, Vol. 4 No. 1 Spring 2008, chief ed. Redzic, 11.

⁵⁹⁰ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 664.

⁵⁹¹ Stephen C. Barton, “Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 12.

Qur'anically, the greatest demonstration of God's *cosmo-agapsis* (رحمة) is the sending of Muhammad into "all the worlds" (Q 21:107).⁵⁹²

Level II: Friendship Love (*Philiopistis*): This describes intimate, but conditional and potentially non-permanent love for *average* believers; denoted by the words *philia* in John (for Lazarus, 11:3). This corresponds to the Name of God *al-Wadud* (الودود) in the Qur'an, as in "Indeed, those who believe and perform righteous actions the Indiscriminately Compassionate (الرحمن) will bestow upon them His friendship love (ودا [Q 19:96])."

Level III: Special Love (*Agapistis*): Highly intimate love for *devout* believers; called "eternal love" by Schnelle.⁵⁹³ It is *also* denoted by the word *agape* in John (10:17, 15:9, 17:26; for the "Beloved Disciple," 13:23, 19:26). This corresponds to the word *mahabbah* (محبة) in Islam's theo-mystical tradition and corresponds to the other attribute of Allah in the *Basmala*, *al-Rahim* (الرحيم).

Level IV: Special Love with Permanent Friendship (*Philiagapsis*): This describes the highest love (محبة) coupled with permanent intimacy (عشق); the believer has been sanctified by God through mastering the spiritual path. The slave is perfected in God's attributes and becomes His "image" upon the earth; also denoted by the word *philia* in John (15:15; 21:15; for the "Beloved Disciple," 20:2).⁵⁹⁴ This special love (محبة خاصة) with permanent friendship (ولاية) is the station of the prophets and saints - the "love of the elite of the elite" according to 'Abd Qadir al-Jaza'iri (d. 1300/1883). *Philiagapsis* is a

⁵⁹² Q 21:107: The Qur'an's "John 3:16."

⁵⁹³ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 664.

⁵⁹⁴ The Beloved Disciple is described here (John 20:2) as: μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς. The evangelist upgrades Jesus' love for him from *agapistic* (13:23, 19:26) to *philiagapic* because he is the first (and foremost) witness to the Resurrection.

“permanent inclination of an enraptured heart” (ميل دائم بقلب هائم)⁵⁹⁵ the end of which is “lucidity and *remaining*” (صحو وبقاء)⁵⁹⁶ in God. However, even within *philiagapsis* there are degrees of intimacy (أنس) between God and His prophets. For example, while Abraham is the *Khalil* (Intimate Friend) of God and Muhammad is the *Habib* (Beloved) of God, this does not mean that Abraham is not *Habib* as well. Certainly, he is. However, God’s *heightened* level of *philiagapsis/mahabbah khass* for Muhammad is what these titles indicate. In John 15:15 Jesus calls the Disciples his “friends” (φίλους), then commands them to “love one another” after intimating that he “remains” (μένω) in God’s love (John 15:10). Ibn ‘Ajibah mentions that the Prophet Muhammad was once asked: “Who are God’s friends (من أولياء الله)?” He answered, “Those who love one another for God’s sake (المتحابون في الله).”⁵⁹⁷

Similarly, the *love of man for man* for God’s sake exhibits these four levels as well:

Level I: General Love (*Cosmo-agapsis*): Showing mercy to humanity indiscriminately.

Level II: Friendship Love (*Philiopistis*): Loving fellow believers in God and establishing mutually-respectful relationships with them.

Level III: Special Love (*Agapistis*): Highly loving teachers, saints, and prophets and striving to emulate their ways and follow their teachings.

⁵⁹⁵ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 10. Ibn ‘Ajibah uses the adjective ميل (mail) to describe an “inclined” or “leaning” heart in his definition of *mahabbah*, and just as Christ “leans” upon the “heart” (κόλπος) of the Father (John 1:18), the Beloved Disciple leans upon the “heart” (κόλπος) of Christ (John 13:23).

⁵⁹⁶ *ibid*, 11.

⁵⁹⁷ *ibid*, 19. Aresmouk and Fitzgerald mention that this *hadith* is mentioned Abu Talib al-Makki in his (*Qut al-qulub*) where it is attributed to Jesus.

Level IV: Special Love with Permanent Friendship (*Philiagapsis*): Establishing a permanently intimate relationship with a spiritual Master through continued and personal contact and loving him unconditionally so as to obey him without question.

Now let us consider the following enigmatic exchange between Christ and Peter in John chapter 21:

(15) Then when they had eaten breakfast, 'Isa said to Simon Peter, "Simon (son of) Jonah, do you love me (ἀγαπᾷς με) more than these (others)?" He said to him, "Yes, Master, you know well that I love you (φιλῶ σε)!" He said to him (Peter), "Feed my lambs." (16) A second time he said to him, "Simon (son of) Jonah, do you love (ἀγαπᾷς με) me?" He said to him, "Yes, Master, you know that I love you (φιλῶ σε)!" He said to him, "Shepherd my sheep." (17) He said to him a third time, "Simon (son of) Jonah, do you (really) love me (φιλεῖς με)?" And Peter became sad because he said to him the *third* time, "(Do) you (really) love me (φιλεῖς με)?" So he said to him, "Master, you know all things. You are aware that I love (φιλῶ σε) you!" ['Isa] said to him, "Feed my sheep."

From the exchange we notice that when Jesus asks Peter if he has special love (*agapistis*) for him, Peter's answer affirms not only (special) *agape* but *permanent* friendship (*philiagapsis*). I do not imagine that Peter corrects Jesus by downgrading his love for the latter to friendship love (*philiopistis*), in which case his response to Christ would be equated to, "Yes Master, you know well that I love you (but only) *as a friend*." Such a response would ring disrespectful and simply does not correlate to Peter's previous action of plunging himself into the sea upon learning that it was in fact his *beloved* Jesus who stood on the shore (John 21:7). I also do not suppose that the terms are being used interchangeably, because it appears obvious to me that the inspired author (المؤلف) wants to make a subtle point in his word choice. Jesus repeats the first question and Peter answers in the same way. The third time, however, Jesus asks Peter if he *really*

has *philiagapsis* for him, since he denied him three times. *This* question obviously saddens Peter because he recognizes that Jesus is suspicious about his claim. Peter is again contrasted with the Beloved Disciple whose *philiagapsis* is without question and never denied Jesus but followed him even to the foot of the cross.

John 3:16: “World”

The word “world” (κόσμος) occurs seventy-nine times in the Gospel of John albeit with different nuances of meaning. It is my contention that in addition to being in “contrast to heaven,”⁵⁹⁸ although this is not a consistently sharp contrast, it is quite often used to denote Israel, or even the “Jewish world,” since what happens in Israel (especially Jerusalem) and to Israelites, has global or cosmopolitan repercussions. The Jews are the Chosen People of God⁵⁹⁹ thus Israel is the “world’s stage” (*Scena Mundi*) from a spiritual standpoint, while Rome (like America today) remained the world’s stage from a political and material standpoint. With respect to John 3:16 specifically, I believe that κόσμος means the “Jewish world;” it denotes both Jews living in Israel as well as in Diaspora, but by *extension* includes the Gentiles. In the next verse Jesus says: “For God did not send His Son into the world (this time), so that he might judge the world, but so that the world might be saved *through* him.” In other words, the Messiah (the *monogenes* Son of God) is not the militaristic Davidic-warrior and judge (שופט) in his first coming. He will rather “save” the world, the Jewish nation, in the sense that he will postpone its national annihilation by selflessly giving his life. This is the great demonstration of God’s *cosmo-agapic* love for the Jewish people which will allow them to hear the message of the

⁵⁹⁸ BDAG, 223.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Q 2:47.

Gospel and accept Jesus as their Messiah via apostolic mission. This love, however, also extends to the Gentiles since a great many of them will also convert and believe in Jesus. Schnelle also establishes a link between κόσμος and the Ἰουδαῖοι by stating that the latter are “only a subordinate aspect of *the primary anti-God reality, namely the cosmos*” (emphasis Schnelle’s). In other words, the cosmos extends beyond Israel and is even sometimes portrayed in a positive light by the evangelist. Thus Schnelle concludes that John exhibits a “dualizing tendency” rather than being rigidly dualistic.⁶⁰⁰ Other examples of κόσμος as a primary denotation of Israel include:

John 1:10.9: ... “the world (κόσμος) did not recognize him.” Jesus did not leave Palestine during his ministry. The “world” denotes the Jews who (almost collectively) failed to recognize his messiahship. The very next verse states: “He came into his own people (the Jews) but his own did not accept him.”

John 1:29.9: ... “Behold! The lamb of God; the one who lifts up the sin of the world! (κόσμος).” Jesus dies to postpone the collective punishment of Israel. His example motivated repentance (*teshuvah*) from the Jews, thus he effects the “lifting up of sin.” See: John 4:42 as well (... “he is the Savior of the world”).

John 6:14.9: ... “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world (κόσμος)!” This is a reference to Deut. 18:18 which begins: “A prophet I will raise up for them (the Israelites).”

John 7:4.9: ... “If you do these things, show yourself to the world (κόσμος)!” Jesus’ kinsmen want him to present himself at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem.

John 11:27.9: ... “I have *already* believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world (κόσμος).” Martha equates the Jewish Messiah with the “world.”

John 12:19.9: ... “Behold! The world (κόσμος) has gone after him!” The Pharisees make this comment during Jesus’ entry into *Jerusalem*, the Jewish capital.

John 15:18: “If the world (κόσμος) hates you, know that *me* - it first hated.” Jesus is referring to his rejection by the Jewish authorities in the first instance. The Romans did not necessarily “hate” Jesus, but his disciples will be hated by them.

⁶⁰⁰ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 683.

John 16:7-11: “But the *truth*, I say to you: It is better for you that I should depart, for if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you, but if I should go, I will send him to you. And having come, he will convict the (Jewish) world (κόσμος) concerning sin, justice, and judgment. Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me. Concerning justice, because I go to the Father and no longer will you see me. And concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.” Jesus makes this statement after predicting excommunication from the “synagogue” and the murder of his followers (John 16:2).

John 17:21.9: ... “so that the world (κόσμος) might believe that You sent me.” Believing in Jesus as the “Sent One” is primarily the responsibility of the Jew.

John 18:20.5: ... “I have spoken openly to the world (κόσμος), I always taught in a synagogue or in the Temple, where all the Jewish authorities gather.” Jesus spoke on the “world’s stage” among the Chosen People.

*My boy,
All the saints are sons of God:
Whether here or there, present or absent,
Always aware, vigilant and awake.
- Rumi⁶⁰¹*

John 3:16: “Son”

The question that greatly concerns the Muslim reader of John 3:16, is the usage of the phrase τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ (*ton uion ton monogene* [acc.]) which I have translated “unique Son (*the* Messiah).” In my view, the Qur’an’s explicit condemnation of “divine sonship” is in reality, a condemnation of how the Trinitarian churches understood the concept - severed from its Jewish roots. From the Prologue it is clear that through faith in Christ, *believers* can be “children of God” (τέκνα θεοῦ [John 1:12]) as well. “What the Sufis understand by a reference to the concept of ‘Father’ with respect to Jesus such as when the Gospel quotes Jesus as saying, ‘I go to the Father’ (John 16:16), is that the saints are the spiritual children of the Divine... a ‘spiritual offspring.’”⁶⁰² However Trinitarian Johannine exegetes, many of the same who incidentally see no distinction

⁶⁰¹ Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 23.

⁶⁰² *ibid.*

between *agape* and *philia*, point out that there is indeed a difference between the Greek words “*uios*” (υἱός) and “*teknon*” (τέκνον); they mention that the former is *only* applied to Christ in Johannine texts as Jesus is the literal Son of God, pre-eternal (*prohyparchein*) and consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father, while all others are “adopted” by God through to their faith and are thus only *tekna* (metaphorical children) and never *uioi* (literal). Interestingly, Paul does not seem to share this discrimination with respect to the meanings of *uios* and *teknon*; he says respectively: “For all of you are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ [Gal. 3:26]); “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God” (ὅσοι γὰρ πνεύματι θεοῦ ἄγονται οὗτοι εἰσιν υἱοὶ θεοῦ [Rom. 8:14]). Paul refers to believers in Christ as *uioi* (υἱοὶ) in both verses, the exact word used for Christ himself in other Pauline passages. Paul does not seem to envision an essential difference between Christ and his followers, but rather a distinction of rank. However, we are not dealing here with the Pauline corpus, we are dealing with John. Therefore, the linguistic nuance of the Trinitarian exegete is well taken - Jesus is indeed unique in his “sonship.” In my view, this uniqueness, or “one-of-a-kindness,” denoted by the Johannine term *monogenes* (μονογενής) in John 3:16, however, reflects a distinction of nearness, proximity (قرب), or intimacy (أنس) with God, for Christ is in “the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18.5) and the one and only *Messiah*. Even Hengel admits: “*Μονογενής* describes the Son in his unique relation to the Father.”⁶⁰³ C. Brown says: “To be a ‘Son of God’ one has to be a being who is *not* God! It is a designation for a creature indicating a special relationship with

⁶⁰³ Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 285.

God. In particular, it denotes God's representative, God's vice-regent"⁶⁰⁴ - his true *khalifah*.

It is well known that John the Baptist never laughed in all his life and that Jesus never cried, for the former was in a state of contraction and the latter in one of expansion. -
Hojwiri.⁶⁰⁵

'Isa "expands" while Yahya the Baptist "contracts"

(22) After these (events), 'Isa and his disciples went into the land of Judea and he stayed there with them and baptized. (23) And Yahya was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim because water was plentiful there; and (people) came and were baptized. (24) For Yahya had not yet been thrown into prison. (25) Then an argument arose between the disciples of Yahya and a (certain) Jew concerning purification. (26) So they came to Yahya and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you beyond the Jordan, for whom you have borne witness (that he is al-Masih), Look! He is baptizing and everyone is coming to him." (27) Yahya answered and said, "A person cannot receive anything unless it is given to him from heaven. (28) You yourselves bear witness that I said, 'I am not al-Masih, but I have been sent before him.' (29) The one who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly on account of the voice of the bridegroom. Therefore, my joy has been fulfilled! (30) It is necessary for him to increase (and become greater) and for me to decrease (and become less important).⁶⁰⁶ (31) The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth is from the earth,⁶⁰⁷ and speaks about the earth, but the one who comes from heaven is above all. (32) He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, but no one receives his witness. (33) The one who receives his witness has set his seal of affirmation upon this: Allah is true. (34) For whom Allah sent speaks the words⁶⁰⁸ of Allah, for He gives (to him) the Spirit without measure. (35) The Father *highly* loves the Son (*agapistically*) and has put into his hand all things. (36) The one who believes in the Son has⁶⁰⁹ eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not (ever) see life, but the anger of Allah remains upon him."

⁶⁰⁴ Colin Brown, "Trinity and Incarnation: In Search of Contemporary Orthodoxy," in *Ex Auditu* 7 (1991), 88.

⁶⁰⁵ Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 106. However, "Jesus wept" (ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς [John 11:35]).

⁶⁰⁶ "Contraction (*qabd*) and expansion (*bast*) are two states that comes to those who have passed beyond the states of fear and hope. In the gnostic, contraction takes the place of fear for the novice and expansion takes the place of hope." Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa'iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 43.

⁶⁰⁷ i.e. belongs to the earth.

⁶⁰⁸ Jesus speaks "the words of the God" (*ta raimata tou theou* [τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ θεοῦ]), the articulated Speech (كلمات or كلام لفظي), the expressed words (*logoi prophorikoi*). All speech from Jesus is *wahy* either *verba* or *vox dei*.

⁶⁰⁹ The present tense *exei* (ἔχει) here serves as evidence of "realized eschatology," first coined by Dodd, that many interpreters find in John. Eternal life has arrived already. The future *opsetai* (ὀψεται) implies that those who reject Jesus will never have eternal life if they continue in their rejection of him.

Perhaps Philo can help us understand Jesus' statement in John 3:35.9: πάντα δέδωκεν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ. In his *Life of Moses*, Philo explains that Moses as king acquired power over natural forces in addition to other human beings.⁶¹⁰ Since God made Moses his "friend" (Exodus 33:11), and Litwa says: "'Friendship' in the ancient world was a privileged status that kings and emperors often bestowed on lesser rulers and representatives."⁶¹¹ According to the Stoics, friends shared all their possessions (κοινὰ τὰ φίλων) (*SVB* 3.618). As God's friend, Moses became co-regent or partner (κοινωνός) in the governance of God's possessions;"⁶¹² Moses became "co-owner" of the heavens and the earth and thus had "all things put into his hand." Christ speaks the words of God, receives the Spirit of God in abundance, is beloved to God, and thus also was made "partner" in the governance of the cosmos. Obviously, this "angelic" power is not intrinsic to Christ nor Moses for that matter, and bestowed upon these men by God due to a Divine appointment of them as vessels for His word. All of this points to the divinization of Christ, who according to the *hadith* of Muhammad did not discriminate between gold and mud since he possessed all things as God's sanctified agent. Christ comments according to this tradition that *this*, i.e. displaying indifference toward matter, is the secret to walking on water, that is, the secret to bringing natural properties under one's command.⁶¹³

⁶¹⁰ Philo, *De vita Mosis*, 1.155-57.

⁶¹¹ Litwa, "The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria," in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 11. Litwa recommends for further reading: Peder Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for His Time* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 201.

⁶¹² *ibid*, 11.

⁶¹³ *Hadith* of Ahmad.

The True Worship of Allah and Foundational 'I am' Statement

Chapter Four: (1) When 'Isa came to know that the Pharisees heard that he was making and baptizing more disciples than Yahya (2) - although 'Isa himself was not baptizing but his disciples - (3) he left Judea and started to go back again into Galilee. (4) But it was necessary for him to pass through Samaria. (5) He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the field which Ya'qub gave to his son Yusuf. (6) And the well of Ya'qub was there, so 'Isa, exhausted from the journey, was sitting at the well; it was about the sixth hour (noon). (7) A Samaritan woman came to draw water (and) 'Isa said to her, "Give me to drink." (8) For his disciples had gone into the city to buy food. (9) Then the Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask to drink of me, being a Samaritan woman? For Jews do not associate with Samaritans." (10) 'Isa answered and said to her, "If you only knew the gift of Allah, and who is the one who is speaking to you (saying), 'Give me to drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." (11) The woman said to him, "Sir, you don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. So from where will you (draw) the living water? (12) You are not greater than our father Ya'qub, the one who gave us the well, and he himself, his sons, and his livestock drank from it, are you?" (13) 'Isa answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks from this water will thirst again, (14) But whoever drinks from the water which I will give him, will never ever thirst for all time to come,⁶¹⁴ but the water which I will give to him, will become in him a spring of water which wells up into eternal life." (15) The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water so I will not thirst nor come here again to draw (water)." (16) He said to her, "Go and call your husband and come back here." (17) The woman answered and said to him, "I don't have a husband." 'Isa said to her, "You spoke well that you do not have a husband, (18) for you have had five husbands, and the one who have now is not your husband; this you said truthfully." (19) She said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet! (20) Our fathers worshipped on this mountain (Gerizim), but you (Jews) say that in Jerusalem (Temple Mount) is the place where it is necessary to worship." (21) 'Isa said to her, "Believe me, (dear) woman, a time a coming when neither upon this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. (22) You (Samaritans) worship that which you don't know, while we (Jews) worship that which we know, because salvation comes from the Jews. (23) But a time is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for even the Father is seeking those who worship Him (like this)." (24) *Allah is (a) Spirit*, so it is necessary for those who worship Him to worship Him in spirit and in truth." (25) The woman said to him, "I know fully well that the Messiah, who is called Christ, is coming; and when he comes, he will announce to us all things." (26) 'Isa said to her, "*I am* (he) - the one speaking with you!" (27) Meanwhile,⁶¹⁵ his disciples returned and were shocked that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said (to him), "What do you want?" or "Why are you speaking with her?" (28) Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city and said to the people, (29) "Come and see a man who told me

⁶¹⁴ This statement is a very intensive negative: οὐ μὴ διψήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (John 4:14.5).

⁶¹⁵ ἐπὶ τούτῳ: "in the mean time" or "meanwhile" (BDAG s.v. *epi* 18b).

everything which I have done! Could he possibly be the Messiah?! (30) (So) they left the city and were coming to him.

“I am” ... the Messiah

Despite John 4:26 being the very first and thus foundational “I am statement” of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John, I would contend that many Christian readers simply overlook it and focus more intently on the much later John 8:58 and 10:30, namely because the latter verses lend themselves more easily toward Trinitarian interpretations. This is unfortunate because John 4:26 reveals the true meanings of all subsequent “I am” claims. The seven “I am” statements are “summaries of the Johannine revelation theology”⁶¹⁶ and “miniature Gospels”⁶¹⁷ in and of themselves. First of all, Christ demonstrates to the Samaritan woman that he is a prophet by performing miracles (معجزة) of episteme by revealing the woman’s entire sexual history and then predicting the future calamity that will descend upon Palestine at the hands of the Romans. However, despite the destruction of the Temple and the abandonment of Mount Gerizim, God will be worshipped with what Christ describes for the woman as “true worship” - “to worship Him in spirit and in truth” (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν). The worship of God is not tied down to any sacred *topos* (مكان), because God is not located in space/time, *God is (a) Spirit*. As Imam ‘Ali once remarked in what seems to have been in response to proto- (or crypto) Anthropomorphic elements, “God was, before space, and He is now exactly as He was” (الله كان قبل المكان و هو الان ما عليه كان). Avicenna said that the “Essentially Necessary Existent” (واجب الوجود بذاته) “has no genus (*jins*), or definition (*hadd*), or a counterpart (*nidd*), or an opposite (*didd*), and is detached (*bari*) from matter (*madda*),

⁶¹⁶ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 686.

⁶¹⁷ John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 186.

quality (*kayf*), quantity (*kam*), place (*ayn*), situation (*wad'*), and time (*waqt*).”⁶¹⁸ Once again I see Christ doing here what the Qur'an describes him as doing - “I have come to affirm the Torah which is before me” (مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيِّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ) - with respect to the great iconoclastic verse contained in the Decalogue: “Do not make for yourself an image or any likeness of that which is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, in the waters beneath the earth” (לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה-לָךְ פֶּסֶל וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם לְתַחַת הָאָרֶץ [Exo. 20:4]). Ironically, Origen utilized this verse (John 4:24) to refute his Gnostic opponents, i.e. Marcionites (primarily), by stating that since God is (a) Spirit and thus incorporeal, He must be simple and indivisible.⁶¹⁹ Thus for Origen, Christ is not a “part” nor “division” of God because only material entities have parts; Christ is rather *homoousios* with the Father *as* God.

Then in a stunning admission, Jesus claims to be the Jewish Messiah; *this* claim is made by using the words “I am” (Εγώ εἰμι). Trinitarian exegetes consistently point out that “I am” was the Name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush mentioned in Exodus 3:14. Thus Jesus is not *only* claiming to be the Messiah, but in quintessential Johannine “double-meaning” style, he is actually claiming to be God Himself. However, absolutely critical to the Exodus passage is the seemingly enigmatic *duplication* of the “I am,” (Heb: “*Ehye asher Ehye* (אהיה אשר אהיה); which is also present in all three Qur’anic versions of the story (Q 20:12; 27:9; 28:30), for example, (اني انا الله رب العالمين [Q 20:12])). And as I stated earlier, for Junayd and Ja’far al-Sadiq, this duplication (تكرير) points to God’s existential attribute of Being (وجود) as well as denotes a denial of “any definable

⁶¹⁸ Quoted from Nader El-Bizri, "God: Essence and Attributes," in *The Cambridge Companion of Classical Islamic Theology*, 132; citing Ibn Sina, *Kitab al-Hidaya*, ed. Muhammad 'Abduh (Cairo, 1874), 262-263; Salim Mashran, *al-Janib al-ilahi 'inda Ibn Sina* (Damascus, 1992), 99; Ibn Sina, *Shifa*, 354.

⁶¹⁹ Cf. Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 65 who references: Origen, *Princ.* 1.1.6.

essence or quiddity of the divine.”⁶²⁰ The significance of the duplication involves the idea that God is the *only* one who can *truly* say “I am,” because His existence is absolutely necessary and non-contingent while all other “existences” are only possible through Him. This is precisely what the translators of the Septuagint understood about the duplication as evidenced in their Greek translation of the Hebrew statement as: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, the latter half consisting of the masculine article (ὁ) followed by the present active participle of the verb “to be” (ὢν), and related to the word “ontology,” thus literally “the (one) being,” and *precisely* the title of God according to Philo (ὁ ὢν), “the Existent.” I would translate the Greek as, “I am *the One who is*,” meaning the One who has absolute and necessary existence, the One who is Pure Being. Jesus, however, never goes beyond saying ἐγώ εἰμι, and read within the context of John 4, it becomes unambiguously clear that he is claiming to be the Jewish Messiah, the “Son of God,” as it were, and not God Himself.

However, I do believe in the presence of “double-meaning” in Christ’s messianic admissions and that he *does* indeed have Moses’ mystical conversation with God in mind while phrasing his “I am” claims. Thus I agree with Schnelle who says that Jesus intentionally adopts “the Father’s mode of revelatory speech.”⁶²¹ But first of all, let us rule out the possibility that these statements are a type of *shatha* (شطحه), or ecstatic/theopathic utterance uttered while in a fleeting state of overwhelming actualization (تحقيق) of God or complete annihilation (فناء) of selfhood. The actualizations of Christ of God are not fleeting nor are his utterances spoken unmindfully. His “I am”

⁶²⁰ Cf. Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996), 78.

⁶²¹ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 686. Cf. Exodus 3:14 LXX; Isaiah 43:10-11 LXX.

statements point to him as God's sanctified agent upon the earth; the one who, according to Ibn al- 'Arabi, "mimics" God is His actions and even in His Speech. When Christ asked his disciples saying: "Who will be my helpers (since I am going) to God?," they answered "We will be God's helpers (أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ)" (Q 3:52.5). Thus the "helpers of Jesus" and "helpers of God" are one and the same - he and the Father are one in spirit and will. Just as I stated about the Prophet Muhammad earlier, Jesus Christ as "Perfect Man" (الانسان الكامل), acts as the medium through which the everlasting God is known and manifested. Christ is God's very immanence; the one who reveals the *ethos* of his Lord and mirrors the pleroma of His majestic (جلالي) and beautiful (جمالي) attributes as much as is possible for a human being. Just as God said in an apocryphal hadith *qudsi* "I am Ahmad without the 'm'" (أنا أحمد بلا ميم), denoting God's uniqueness (أحدية) and absolute perfection as well as the Prophet's near perfection (or imperfection) (أحمد), and his "divinized/theomorphic" or "godlike" actions and speech - just as Ahmad (أحمد) resembles Ahad (أحد) - Jesus, who says ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ Χριστός resembles God who says, ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν. In fact, it is in the great Qur'anic "I am" statement of Christ that these concepts are intimated. According to Q 19:30, Jesus said, "I am indeed the servant of God!" He is the servant of God, *par excellence*, who in serving his Lord with perfect obedience, reflects his Lord, thus revealing Him to the world. Christ is the "Perfect Spirit which is a theophany (*mazhar*) of the All-Comprehensive Name: Allah."⁶²² According to the Sufis, the highest epithet bestowed by God is "*Abdullah*" (servant of God), "where the honor comes in linking the Creator with the created *in one name*."⁶²³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr says: "According to Islamic metaphysics, all beings reflect certain Divine Names and

⁶²² Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 26.

⁶²³ *ibid*, 32.

Qualities, but man (*homo* or *insan*), meaning both male and female, is the only being in this world who in his or her full reality as the Universal or Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) is the mirror that reflects all of the Divine Names. Now, the Name of Allah contains all the Divine Names,”⁶²⁴ “it designates God inasmuch as He is named by all the names and synthesizes their diverse meanings in His one Reality,”⁶²⁵ “and that is why one of the names of the Prophet, as the Universal Man par excellence, was ‘Abd Allah and not, for example, ‘Abd al-Karim, ‘*abd* here meaning the recipient and reflection of any of His Names.”⁶²⁶ *Only Muhammad and Christ are called “Abd Allah” in the Qur’an*. There is actually another version of the famous *hadith qudsi* in Bukhari I mentioned in Chapter One; it is the *hadith* that both Junayd and al-Jaza’iri believe intimate mystical union with God. After the familiar, “My servant draws near unto Me by means of nothing more dear to Me than his obligatory actions. Then he continues to draw near unto Me with his supererogatory actions until I love him,” we find, “And when I love him, *I am He* (كنته).”⁶²⁷

Thus when we compare the Greek of Exodus 3:14 from the LXX with John 4:26 and the Arabic of the Qur’an’s Christological “I am statement” (Q 19:30) with God’s self-identification in Q 28:30, we notice a very deliberate “*shadowing*” of God in the claims of Christ. We do not, however, notice the critical duplication of “I am”:

⁶²⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ed.-in-Chief, *The Study Qur’an: A New Translation and Commentary*, xxxii.

⁶²⁵ William C. Chittick, “Worship,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 233.

⁶²⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ed.-in-Chief, *The Study Qur’an: A New Translation and Commentary*, xxxii.

⁶²⁷ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 59.

Exodus 3:14: Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν

John 4:26: Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ λαλῶν σοι (Μεσσίας)

Q 28:30: (اني انا الله رب العالمين)

Q 19:30: (اني عبد الله)

The Food of the Messiah

(31) Meanwhile, the disciples were begging⁶²⁸ him saying, “Rabbi, eat!” (32) He said to them, “I have food to eat which you don’t know about.” (33) Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Did someone bring him (food) to eat?” (34) ‘Isa said to them, “My food is that I do the will of the One who sent me and that I complete His work. (35) You tell the saying, ‘There are yet four months until the harvest comes,’ don’t you? Look! I say to you, raise up your eyes and look at the fields: they are already white for the harvest! (36) The one who harvests receives wages and gathers fruit (people) into eternal life, so that the sower and the harvester rejoice together! (37) For in this the saying, ‘One is the sower and another is the harvester,’ is true. (38) I sent you to harvest that which you did not work hard (to plant); others have worked hard (to plant) and you entered into their work (and will reap their harvest).”

(39) And from that city, many of the Samaritans believed in him because of the statement of the woman testifying, “He told me all things which I have done.” (40) When the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, so he stayed there for two days. (41) And many more believed because of his teachings (word). (42) They said to the woman, “We no longer only believe because of what you said, for we have heard him ourselves and we know that he is truly the Savior of the world.”

Spiritual Sustenance

What is this food that Christ possesses which the Disciples do not know about? In

John 4:8 we are told that Jesus was left alone with the woman at the well, “For his

disciples had gone into the city in order to buy food” (οἱ γὰρ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ

ἀπεληλύθεισαν εἰς τὴν πόλιν ἵνα τροφὰς ἀγοράσωσιν). The word for “food” here is

trophe (τροφή), and the evangelist is using it to represent actual physical food that one

literally eats. When the disciples return and offer Jesus their food (τροφή), he responds

⁶²⁸ This is ἠρωτῶν, from ἐρωτάω (to ask), but in the imperfect thus suggesting a type of extended plea.

with “I have food to eat... My food is that I do the will of the One who sent me and that I complete His work” (Ἐγὼ βρωσιν ἔχω φαγεῖν... Ἐμὸν βρωμά ἐστιν ἵνα ποιῶ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με καὶ τελειώσω αὐτοῦ τὸ ἔργον [John 4:32.5, 34.9]). It was Johannine statements like this that contributed to Christological controversies such as Monothelitism among early Christians, eventually leading to its condemnation at Constantinople III in 681 CE. With respect to Divine Will (θέλημα), I would affirm four aspects: 1) Decretive or Decreed Will: The eternal and pre-ordained unalterable Will; 2) Prescriptive Will: The expression of His Will found in textual pre/proscriptions; 3) Preferential (Desiderative or Well-Pleasing) Will: “The desire to become loveable to God (التحبيب إلى الله) by accomplishing what pleases Him (يرضى),” according to Ibn ‘Ajibah’s Lexicon.⁶²⁹ In other words, to follow His Prescriptive Will; 4) Permissive Will: Actions allowed (permitted) by God whether good or evil. It is between the latter two that human agency vacillates. An important aspect of mystical union with God is the alignment of one’s desires with that of God’s Preferential Will so that the ego only wants what God wants. Everything in creation is in a state of *islam* (“submission” [anarthrous]) to God, whether they like it or are even aware of it: “And to God prostrates whatever is in the heavens and earth - *in obedience or by force* (طوعا وكرها) - as do their shadows in the morning and evening” (Q 13:15.1). However, those who are in a state of al-Islam (or simply Islam) strive to do only those things that are Well-Pleasing to God. Doing the Well-Pleasing Will of God is the “food” of Christ - “I always do the things pleasing to Him” (ἐγὼ τὰ ἀρεστὰ αὐτῷ ποιῶ πάντοτε [John 8:29.9]).

⁶²⁹ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 17.

Interestingly, Jesus uses (a) different word(s) for “food” in his response, βρῶσις/βρῶμα. The inspired evangelist is once again drawing an important distinction between two apparent synonyms that is nearly lost in translation: the difference between *trophe* (or *prosphagion* [προσφάγιον]⁶³⁰ for that matter), and *broxis/broma* (βρῶσις/βρῶμα), is that John intends the latter to be a type of *spiritual* sustenance (مدد or رزق رحاني). This distinction will prove to be crucial when we come to the “offensive” (σκληρός) “eucharistic” teachings of John 6. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon defines βρῶσις as “that which delights and truly satisfies the mind... used of the soul’s aliment... nourishes and supports it unto life eternal.” The BDAG defines Jesus’ βρῶμα as, “doing the will of God.”⁶³¹ Thus while I would translate τροφή as *ta’am* (طعام) in Arabic, the definition of βρῶσις comes very close to *qut* (قوت), which Wehr and Lane define respectively as “aliment, nourishment, food,”⁶³² and “food sufficient to sustain life.”⁶³³ In fact, it is the very word used by the great Sufi Master Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 386/996) to denote Sufi practices that lead to the “station of Oneness” (مقام التوحيد). Thus I would translate the title of his magnum opus, قوت القلوب, as “The Spiritual Nourishment of the Hearts.”

This is not to say that Jesus did not eat actual food, or only “seemed” (*dokesis*) to eat food. However, the closer a person aligns his character upon the character of God, that is to say, the more he becomes “divinized” and resembles Him, the less and less dependent he becomes upon creation. This is why we find the great prophets eating and sleeping less than others while possessing heightened senses of sight and hearing. Both

⁶³⁰ This word is used in the so-called Epilogue (21:5) and is often translated as “meat.”

⁶³¹ BDAG, 148.

⁶³² J M. Cowan (trans. And ed.), *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Ithaca: Spoken Languages Services, Inc., 1994), 930. Hereafter referred to as Wehr.

⁶³³ Lane, 2572 (*Taj al’Arus*).

Jesus and Muhammad, as human reflections of their Lord, epitomize the theological virtue of dependence upon God (توكل), and their physical needs are quite often satiated by encounters with the Divine. In another remarkable Muhammadan “I am statement,” the Prophet explained why his Companions should not engage in his practice of continuous fasting (الوصال) by saying, “*I am* not of your constitution, I have One who feeds and waters me while I sleep.” (إني لست كهيتكم, إني ابیت لی مطعم یطعمنی و ساق یسقین).⁶³⁴ The Prophet’s βρωσις, or spiritual “food,”⁶³⁵ are his nocturnal experiences with Allah during his sleep, and these sustain him throughout the day.

Christ as “Savior”

The importance of chapter four of the Gospel cannot be overstated. Not only does it theologically contextualize all subsequent “I am statements” of Christ throughout the Book of Signs by identifying them as messianic and not deitific claims, it also correlates the Messiah with his role as “Savior” (σωτήρ). At the end of chapter four (verses 41-42), we are told that after Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for two days, many came to believe “because of his teaching” (διὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ), and “knew well” (οἶδαμεν) that he is truly “the Savior of the world” (ὁ σωτήρ τοῦ κόσμου). This is the only occurrence of the word “savior” in John. Are we really to think that the Samaritans came to believe in Jesus as a Messiah who will vicariously atone for sin? First of all, and as stated earlier, John often times uses the word “world” (κόσμος) to represent Israel. Thus Jesus is only *cosmopolitan* in the sense that events that happen in Israel during his time, have global

⁶³⁴ *Hadith* of Bukhari.

⁶³⁵ The verb for feed in this *hadith* is *at’ama* (أطعم) and related to *ta’am* (طعام), thus not *qut* (قوت). However Lane defines *ta’am* as “food of any kind” (Lane, 1854). Like Mary in the Temple (cf. Q 3:37-39), the Prophet receives both physical and well as spiritual sustenance from his Lord.

implications. Israel is the world's stage and the Jewish people are God's chosen people who reside in the very center of His providential care (توفيق). I also mentioned earlier that Jesus "saved," or rather *spared* or preserved⁶³⁶ his nation from *immediate* catastrophe or "delivered them from impending death"⁶³⁷ by selflessly giving his life, but by doing so, proved his messiahship through his resurrection by God. Thus John's Gospel transcends mere "exemplarism"⁶³⁸ or *mimesis*, Jesus' *actions* are saving. Thus Jesus acts in the capacity of *a savior* in a few ways:

1) In the Lukan sense that he makes people conscious of sin and teaches them the importance of repentance (توبة), thus the parable of "the Prodigal Son" (Luke 15). Both the centrality of Israel as well as repentance with respect to Jesus as savior is intimated by Luke in Acts 5:31 and 13:23 respectively, the only occurrences of the word σωτήρ in Acts: "This (Christ) God exalted as Master and Savior with His right hand, (in order) to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins" (τοῦτον ὁ θεὸς ἀρχηγὸν καὶ σωτῆρα ὕψωσεν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ δοῦναι μετάνοιαν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν); "Of this (man's) seed (David), God, according to (His) promise, raised for Israel a savior, Jesus" (τούτου ὁ θεὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ σπέρματος κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν ἤγειρεν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ σωτῆρα Ἰησοῦν).

2) Jesus is additionally "the Savior" in the sense that his teaching acts as a means to achieve salvation, or "eternal life" as stated in earlier in John 3:16. In fact, all prophets, including Muhammad are "saviors" (منقذون) in this sense. The Sufis chant in the famous Muhammadan eulogy, "The Full Moon Has Risen Over us" (طلع البدر علينا):

⁶³⁶ BDAG, 800.

⁶³⁷ *ibid*, 801. This is the definition of σωτήρ.

⁶³⁸ See: Anatasia Scrutton, "'The Truth Will Set You Free:' Salvation as Revelation" in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 359-368.

صفوة الباري محمد

Safwat'ul Bari Muhammad
The choicest of the Creator is Muhammad

درة للكائنات

Durratun lil-ka'inat
The pearl of the universe

مدحه بلسم روحي

Madhuhu balsamu ruhi
Praising him is the balsam of my spirit

و له يخلو السماع

wa lahu yahlu'sama'
And it is sweet to listen to

يا ختام الانبياء

Ya khitama'l anbiya'i
O seal of the prophets

يا امام الاولياء

Ya imama'l awliya
O leader of the saints

رحمة ارسلت طه

rahmatan ursilta Taha
You have been sent as a mercy O Taha

منقذا بعد الضياع

Munqidhan ba'da'l dhiya'
As a savior after the loss.

Muhammad as savior (منقذ) reinvigorated then perfected the path to God after “the loss” (الضياع), namely the loss of the authentic teachings of his predecessor and penultimate Messenger of God Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that out of the four total occurrences of the word σωτήρ in Luke-Acts, three of which refer to Christ and one to God, Luke never calls Jesus “the Savior” with the definite article. Yet Luke records Mary saying in the Magnificat, “And my soul has rejoiced in God (ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ), my Savior (τῷ σωτήρῳ μου), with σωτήρ explicitly definite. Thus while Christ is a savior or sorts, “the Savior of the world (Israel)” to use the Johannine phrase, he is not “the Savior” in the absolute sense; Christ’s ability to save his people is wholly derived from the source of all salvation, Allah. The inclusion of the definite article in John’s description of Jesus as “the

Savior” (ὁ σωτήρ), however, does not equate Jesus with God ontologically, but rather clarifies the nature of his salvific mission and reveals that it is truly God who saves the κόσμος *through* (διὰ) Christ. The same is exactly true of Muhammad. In Q 3:103.1-5 we read: “And guard yourselves by clutching to the rope of God and do not *sectaricize* among yourselves; and remember the blessing of God upon you (all), when you were enemies, but God brought your hearts together and you became *by means of His blessing* (بِنِعْمَتِهِ), brethren. And you were on the brink of the fire but *He (he) saved you from it* (فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا).” Many exegetes identify both the “rope of God” (حبل الله) and the “blessing” (نعمة) as the Prophet himself while the subject-doer of the transitive verb “saved” (انقذ), from which the active participle “savior” (منقذ) is derived, could be God *or the Prophet!* The latter is supported by the conversion story of Khalid b. Said narrated by the *Tabaqat* of Ibn S’ad in which Khalid saw himself in a dream teetering on the precipice of a fiery pit in which stood his father trying to pull him in with him, when suddenly Khalid felt two arms clutch him from behind drag him to safety. He turned around and saw that his savior (منقذ) was Muhammad, God’s “rope” or rather “life-line.”⁶³⁹

3) Christ is also a savior in the Mosaic sense that he is essentially a *goel*, or redeemer, deliverer, who will liberate his people militarily, although this majestic (جلالي) aspect of his vocation will be realized near the *eschaton* and his enemies will be the forces of the Anti-Christ (المسيح الدجال) according to the *hadith* of Muhammad. It was this political-religious⁶⁴⁰ understanding of the Messiah’s mission that prompted the people of Jerusalem to exclaim, “Save us! “Save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the Name of

⁶³⁹ *Tabaqat* IV/I, 68; cf Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based upon the Earliest Sources* (Inner Traditions, 2006), 47.

⁶⁴⁰ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 692.

the Lord, (and is) the King of Israel!” (John 12:13.9) during Christ’s triumphal entry into the city.

4) Jesus is also one of the great intercessors on the Day of Judgment, through whose intercession (شفاعة) God will manifest His Mercy. According to the Qur’an 5:116-118, God will interrogate Christ on the Day of Judgment about his public ministry as to whether he ever claimed to be “a god” (اله),⁶⁴¹ to which Christ responds while “trembling in absolute terror” (وقد ارعد) according to al-Haddad and al-Suyuti.⁶⁴² “Glory be to You! (سُبْحَانَكَ) It is never proper for me to say what I have no right to say! If I said that, then you would have known it. You know what is in my self (نَفْسِي), while I know not what is in Your self (نَفْسِكَ). Indeed, you are the absolute knower of the unseen. Never did I say to them anything except what You commanded me to say, that is, ‘Worship Allah, my Lord and Your Lord’ (أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ). And I was a witness over them while I was among them, but when you seized my soul, You were the Watcher over them, and You are a witness over all things.” Jesus concludes, “If you punish them, then they are Your servants; but if you forgive them, then You are the Great and Wise.” The latter half of this last statement is more emphatic than the first half due to the presence of the repetition, or we may say *duplication*, of the second-person pronoun “You” followed by two adjectives in emphatic form (فَإِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ) - revealing that Christ is actually

⁶⁴¹ A “god” (*ilah*), in this sense, is an entity that intrinsically possesses qualitative divine attributes (الصفات) based upon Scripture that Maturidite and Ash’arite theologians have identified as Omnipotence (المعاني), Absolute Volition (إرادة), Omniscience (علم), Non-contingent Life (حياة), All-Hearing (سمع), All-Seeing (بصر), and pre-eternal Speech (كلام). The fact that Christ admits to not knowing “the Day” (Matt. 24:36) demonstrates a deficiency (نقص) in his knowledge (علم) while God is “free from all deficiencies” (المتنزه عن جميع النقائص) and thus he (Christ) is *disqualified* as being an *ilah* (إله). Jesus’ lack of perfect knowledge is not simply due to his incarnational or economical limitations being in the “form of a servant” as Augustine intimates (c. *Max.* 2.14.8), he is *essentially* imperfect in knowledge as all men are to certain degrees. I will return to this idea later in the present work, *Deo volente*. Thus while Christ is certainly not a “god” in the Qur’anic sense, he is *a theos* in the Johannine or Philonic sense i.e. a sanctified divine agent.

⁶⁴² Suyuti, *Jalalayn*, 5:116.

entreating God to forgive the people who believed in his Messiahship but had erred in their Christological beliefs. According to the Sufis, however, it is Muhammad who is the Grand Intercessor (الشفيع العظيم) of the Day of Judgment who intercedes for the whole of humanity. In *The Shimmering Light* (الضياء اللامع), the compiler al-Habib ‘Umar b. Muhammad b. Salim b. Hafiz mentions:

<i>Anta f'il hasri malathun</i> You are the refuge of the Day of Resurrection <i>Laka kulu'l khalqi tafza'</i> To you all of creation shall flee <i>Wa yunaduna tara maa (Ya Rasulallah)</i> And they will call out, 'Look at us O Messenger of God!' <i>Qad daha min hawlin afza</i> For atrocious terror has come unto us!	انت في الحشر ملاذ لك كل الخلق تفرع و ينادون ترى ما قد دها من هول افزع
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The Second Sign: The Healing of the Royal Official's Son

(43) After the two days, he left from there heading towards Galilee. (44) For 'Isa himself bore witness that a prophet does not have honor in his own homeland. (45) But when he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him because they had seen all the things which he did in Jerusalem during the festival, for they also had gone to the festival.

(46) Then he came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water into wine, and there was a certain royal official whose son was sick in Capernaum. (47) Having heard that 'Isa was leaving Judea and coming into Galilee, he went to him and asked that he go down (to his place) and heal his son, for he was about to die. (48) Therefore 'Isa said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe?" (49) The royal official said to him, "Sir, come down (to my place) before my child dies!" (50) 'Isa said to him, "Go! Your son lives." The man believed the statement⁶⁴³ which 'Isa said to him and left. (51) And while he was going down (to his place) his servants met him saying that his

⁶⁴³ I agree with Moloney that the Gospel of John affirms various levels of faith: 1) "no faith"; 2) "partial"; 3) "complete." See: Francis J. Moloney, SDB, *Love in the Gospel of the John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 40-41. In v. 50 we are told that the royal official "believed the statement" (ἐπίστευσεν τῷ λόγῳ) of Jesus, but it was not until he had confirmed the healing of his son that "he believed" (ἐπίστευσεν). I would argue that the verb *pisteuw* followed by the dative corresponds to an acceptance or tentative or even contingent belief in something, in this case, in the word of Jesus. However when the verb is used with an accusative or with no indirect object (as in v. 53), it corresponds to full faith and trust in Jesus, and "conditional acceptance of the words of Jesus." *ibid*.

son lives. (52) Therefore he asked the time from them in which he got better. They said to him, “Yesterday, at the seventh hour (one o’clock pm), the fever left him.” (53) The father knew that that was the time when ‘Isa said to him, “Your son lives,” so he believed and his entire household. (54) This is again the second sign ‘Isa did when he was coming from Judea to Galilee.

Moloney’s “From Cana to Cana”⁶⁴⁴

As I stated earlier, a common Muslim scholarly objection to the New Testament Gospels in general is that they do not resemble the Qur’an in their form, style, and syntactical structure. These critics maintain the notion that since the Gospels resemble “*Sirah* literature” much more than the Qur’an, then the Gospels cannot be the *Injil* mentioned in the Qur’an. I will admit, at first glance, the Gospel of John (in particular) does appear very “*Sirah*-like:” a composite of seemingly unrelated stories that lack a discernable symmetrical structure. Upon more substantive analysis, however, the Gospel’s ring structure and “revelatory” style become apparent. Moloney, for example, points out a beautiful parallel between the first words of Jesus in the Gospel and his last words (if we consider John 21 to be an Epilogue); he said respectively: “Come and you will see” (ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε [John 1:39.5]) to his Disciples and “Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed!” (μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες [John 20:29.9]) to a Disciple. Moloney considers the “From Cana to Cana” section of the Gospel (John 2:1-4:54) to be essentially “journeys of faith” in which the inspired evangelist, in a very Qur’anic way, engages in careful sacred storytelling in order to conduct *catechesis*. The two miracle stories, the changing of water into wine, and the healing of the royal official’s son (the first and second “Signs”), at the two ends of the section have four common elements: 1) Problem: lack of water and sick son respectively;

⁶⁴⁴ See: Moloney S.D.B., *Sacra Pagina, The Gospel of John*, 63-163 and Moloney, SDB, *Love in the Gospel of the John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study*, 15-16.

2) Request: from Jesus' mother and the official respectively; 3) Rebuke from Jesus initially; 4) Miracle. For Moloney, the key here is to cultivate complete and authentic faith in Jesus by having an "unconditional commitment" to him.⁶⁴⁵ In the first story, such faith is exemplified by a Jew, Mary the mother of Jesus, who said to the servant: "Whatever he should say (λέγει from λέγω) to you, do it!" (John 2:5.9), while in the latter such faith is exemplified by a gentile.⁶⁴⁶

Situated beautifully in the middle of these two Signs are examples of "true, partial, and no faith" inside Israel and the "journey of faith" of the Samaritan woman (and her villagers) outside Israel. With respect to "no faith," it is demonstrated by the Jewish authorities who reject the word of Jesus outright when he tells them that if they destroy "this Temple" he will raise it up again (John 2:19-20). "Partial faith" is demonstrated by Nicodemus in John 3 who comes to Jesus at *night*, however, and while he refers to Christ as "Rabbi" and even suggests that "God is with him," he cannot embrace Jesus fully as the Messiah, but would rather have Jesus conform to *his* notions of what it means to be the Messiah. "True faith," however, is demonstrated by John the Baptist who says: "For God sent him; he speaks the words of God" (John 3:34.1). However, as Volf observes: "Is he [Nicodemus] a believer?... [John] lets Nicodemus blur the boundaries - not a sign of a mind that thinks only in black and white."⁶⁴⁷ The conclusion is that true/complete faith in Jesus is to wholeheartedly accept his word(s). With respect to the Samaritan woman in John 4, her journey of faith begins with "no faith" at all, then "partial faith" by

⁶⁴⁵ Moloney, SDB, *Love in the Gospel of the John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study*, 6.

⁶⁴⁶ Moloney considers the royal official to be a gentile because he is called βασιλικός. Moloney, SDB, *Love in the Gospel of the John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study*, 16.

⁶⁴⁷ Miroslav Volf, "Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism" in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 45. According to Volf, most commentators regard Nicodemus as "virtually a full believer" (See: Barnabas Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 305).

confessing Jesus to be “a prophet,” then “true faith” by embracing him as Messiah and “Savior.” It was Christ’s epistemological miracle or preternatural abilities (بصيرة) that convince her of his prophecy, but complete faith was only achieved when Christ stayed with the Samaritans for two days and teaching them, presumably, the proper elucidation of the Scriptures. This is the proper method of *catechesis* according to Moloney.⁶⁴⁸ Thus when news of Jesus reached her village, “many more believed because of his *word* (λόγος)” (John 4:41). Thus just as contemporary (Western) Qur’an scholars such as Cuypers, Farrin, and Ernst have noticed ring structures, chiasmic concord, and symmetrical patterns in the text of the Qur’an, we also see clear symmetry and “revelatory” structure in the Gospel (*Injil*). We can outline Moloney’s section as follows:⁶⁴⁹

Sign at **CANA** (John 2:1-12): Mary: TRUE FAITH (Jew)

- Problem, Request, Rebuke, Miracle

The Jewish authorities: (John 2:18-21): NO FAITH (Jew)

Nicodemus: (John 3:1-20): PARTIAL FAITH (Jew)

John the Baptist: (John 3:33-36): TRUE FAITH (Jew)

Journey of Faith: The Samaritan Woman: (John 4:7-41) NO → PARTIAL → TRUE (Gentile)

Sign at **CANA** (John 4:46-54): The Royal Official: TRUE FAITH (Gentile)

- Problem, Request, Rebuke, Miracle

The Third Sign: The Healing at the Pool

Chapter Five: (1) After these (events), it was the festival of the Jews so 'Isa went up to Jerusalem. (2) In Jerusalem there is a pool called *Bethzatha* in Hebrew, near the sheep gate, and it has five porches. (3) On these (porches) a multitude of sick and feeble⁶⁵⁰ people: blind, disabled, and paralyzed used to lie down. (4) NO FOURTH VERSE in UBS 4th Ed. (5) There was a certain man

⁶⁴⁸ Moloney, SDB, *Love in the Gospel of the John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study*, 16, 41, 171.

⁶⁴⁹ *ibid*, 15-70.

⁶⁵⁰ ἀσθενέω denotes illness as well as weakness (feebleness). The NRSV renders this “invalids.”

there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. (6) When 'Isa saw this man lying down and knowing that he had already been (in that state) for a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to get well?" (7) The sick man answered him, "Sir, I don't have a person to put me into the pool, when the water is stirred up; and while I am coming (into the pool), another goes down (into the pool) before me." (8) 'Isa said to him, "Stand up and take up your mattress, and walk!" (9) And immediately the man became well and took up his mattress and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

(10) Therefore the Jewish authorities said to the man who had been cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your mattress!" (11) He answered them, "The one who made me healthy, *he* said to me, 'Take up your mattress and walk.'" (12) They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up (your mattress) and walk?'" (13) The man who had been healed did not really know who he was, for 'Isa slipped away since there was a crowd in that place. (14) Later 'Isa found him in the Temple and said to him, "Look! You have been made well, so do not sin any longer or else something worse might happen to you!" (15) The man left and reported to the Jewish authorities that it was 'Isa who made him well. (16) So this was why the Jewish authorities were pursuing 'Isa, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. (17) But 'Isa answered them saying, "My father is still working, so I am also working."⁶⁵¹ (18) Then because of this (statement) the Jewish authorities sought to kill him even to a greater degree, because not only did he break the Sabbath (from their perspective), but also because he said that Allah was his very own Father, (thus) making himself equal to Allah.

Jesus as the Pure Action of God

The esoteric meanings of Jesus asking the sick and feeble man if he wanted to be "well" (ὕγις) and that he should "walk" (περιπάτει) must not be lost upon the Sufi reader of "the third sign." The Greek ὕγις also has a sense of being "sound" or "whole," which can easily be translated into Arabic as *salim* (سليم) or *salah* (صلاح). Both words are used in sacred Muslim text to describe the state of a healthy body or *heart*. The Prophet Muhammad said in a well-known *hadith* mentioned as number six in *The Forty* (الأربعين) of Imam Abu Zakariyya al-Nawawi: "Indeed there is in the body a lump of flesh, that if it is sound, the entire body is sound; and if it is corrupt, the entire body is corrupt. Indeed, it

⁶⁵¹ As God's sanctified agent and divine representative, Jesus is the vessel through which God works.

⁶⁵² is the heart” (ان في الجسد مضغة اذا صلحت صلح الجسد كله, و اذا فسدت فسد الجسد كله, الا و هي القلب).

In the Qur'an, Abraham is praised “for indeed he brought to God a sound heart” (إِذْ جَاءَ) [Q 37:84]). Thus Jesus wants the sick and feeble man to become whole both physically and spiritually. But in order to achieve the latter, he must begin “walking” (περιπάτει) in the spiritual path (الطريقة).

The inspired author then tells us that it was because Jesus was working on the Sabbath that the “Jewish authorities” (Ιουδαῖος), identified as “Pharisees” (Φαρισαῖοι) in the Synoptic tradition, “were “pursuing” (ἐδίωκον) Jesus; the Textus Receptus adding “and were seeking to kill him” (καὶ ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν ἀποκτεῖναι). Jesus’ answer in v. 17 (“My Father until now is working, so I am also working” [Ὁ πατήρ μου ἔως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται καὶ γὰρ ἐργάζομαι]) is an incredible revelation that Christ’s actions are completely guided by God; it reveals that Christ is the *pure action* of God upon the earth. Chittick says: “Only by achieving servanthood is it possible for human beings to live in harmony with God and to *act on his behalf* (emphasis mine).”⁶⁵³ The Jewish authorities interpret Jesus’ action as breaking the Sabbath simply because they are not yet convinced that he is a legitimate prophet, or spokesman, for God. However, as a genuine prophet, Christ may act in the capacity of a renewer (مجدد) or reformer (اصلاحي), making amendments to the Law or as in this case, ameliorating the strictness of Sabbath restrictions. By doing so, he is not destroying the Law but actually perfecting it. The Qur’an tells us that Jesus said: “I have come to confirm the Law (التوراة) which is before me, but also *to make lawful for you some things that were (before) deemed unlawful*”

⁶⁵² *Hadith* of Bukhari and Muslim.

⁶⁵³ William C. Chittick, "Worship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter ed., 230.

وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ [Q 3:50.1]). In the Synoptic tradition, Jesus reminds the Jewish authorities that the Law may be suspended when human life is put into danger; this legal dispensation (رخصة) is actually mandated by the Law itself and thus Jesus is “confirming” (مصدق) this dynamic aspect of Jewish legal understanding. Ibn ‘Abbas explains in his exegesis of this verse that these legal dispensations included, “(eating) the meat of camels, the fat of bovines and sheep, *the Sabbath*, and other things.”⁶⁵⁴ In Matthew 2, Christ uses the story of David and his men as a proof (دليل) of this sabbatical dispensation: David and his men entered the house of God and ate the shewbread of the priests because they were starving. This dynamic or variable aspect of sacred Jewish law (הלכה) is illustrated in a Talmudic story in which Moses was miraculously transported forward to the time of Akiva and was horrified to discover that he was not able to follow what the 2nd century Rabbi was even teaching. However, his mind was set at ease upon realizing that the basis of variables (متغيرات) in his Law are indeed rooted in its immutables (ثوابت), and that these variables become necessary due to the changing circumstances of the human condition such as culture, location, politics, persecution, etc.⁶⁵⁵ Also, every Orthodox student of a Yeshiva knows that the Mishna was inspired by the Holy Spirit (רוח קדוש). Thus the Rabbis wrote about the specifics of the Sabbath laws in *Seder Moed* as well as the various issues (مسائل) that are raised related to them. Therefore, the *Rabbi* Jesus, justifies his healing of a man’s “withered hand” by declaring that it is perfectly “lawful to *do* good on the Sabbath” (ἐξεστὶν τοῖς σάββασις καλῶς ποιεῖν) for if one of their sheep should fall into a pit they would indeed pull it out, and “how much better is a human being than a sheep” (πόσῳ οὖν διαφέρει ἄνθρωπος

⁶⁵⁴ *Tanwir al-Miqbas*, 3:50.

⁶⁵⁵ *Men*, 29b.

προβάτου [Matt. 12:12])? Christ does not “destroy the Law,” (καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον [Matt. 5:17.5]) and “nothing which Jesus said or did which bore on the law led his disciples after his death to disregard it.”⁶⁵⁶

However, Jesus’ response in John 5:17, indicating his union with God, provoked the Jewish authorities “to seek to kill him even to a greater degree, because not only did he break the Sabbath (from their perspective), but also because he said that *Allah was his very own Father* (πατέρα ἰδίου ἔλεγεν τὸν θεόν), (thus) making himself *equal* (ἴσον) to Allah.” Similar to many of the early Sufis in the Islamic tradition, Jesus’ articulations about his relationship with God are now putting him into conflict with legal authorities. It seems as if some of the Jewish authorities believe that Jesus is actually claiming essential equality with God, which is ironically, what most Christian exegetes conclude about Jesus’ statement as well! - such as Athanasius.⁶⁵⁷ Or perhaps they understood Christ as claiming God as his “personal” (ἰδίου) Father thus “equalizing” himself with God on the level of *authority*. As stated earlier, Jesus is indeed a unique “Son” but not because he is “co-substantially” God, contra Athanasius, but because he is the one true Messiah. The “sonship” of the Messiah with God exists at a higher and more perfect degree than other “sons and daughters” (τέκνα). God is his “own” (ἰδίου) Father only in this sense. As God’s sanctified agent and theomorphic “image,” Christ’s actions on earth represent the actions of God. Thus Jesus *is* indeed equal (ἴσον) with God at some level; a level that he will clarify in the following exchange.

⁶⁵⁶ Philip S. Alexander, "Jewish Law in the Time of Jesus: Towards a Clarification of the Problem," in *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity by Members of the Ehrhardt Seminar of Manchester University*, Barnabas Lindars, ed., (New York: Cambridge Univ., 1988), 44.

⁶⁵⁷ *C. Ar.* 1.11-13.

'Isa Clarifies His "Equality" with Allah

19) 'Isa answered and said to them, "Indeed I say to you: the Son is not able to do *anything* by himself, unless he sees the Father do something. For whatever He does, the Son does *in a similar way*. **(20)** For the Father loves the Son (*philiagapically*), and shows him all things which He Himself does, and He will show to him (even) greater works than these so that you will be amazed! **(21)** For even as the Father raises the dead and gives life, thus the Son also gives (eternal) life to those whom he wants. **(22)** Neither does the Father judge anyone, but all judgment He has given to the Son.⁶⁵⁸ **(23)** So that all who honor the Son, also honor the Father. The one who dishonors the Son, dishonors the Father, the One who sent him! **(24)** Indeed I say to you: The one who obeys my message and believes in the One who sent me has eternal life and will not come unto judgment, but has crossed-over from death into life. **(25)** Indeed, I say to you: A time is coming, as is now here, when the dead will obey the voice of the Son of Allah, and the ones who have obeyed will live. **(26)** For even as the Father has life in Himself, even so He *gave* (the power of) life to the Son to have in himself. **(27)** And He gave him permission to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. **(28)** Don't be amazed at this - for a time is coming in which all who are in their graves will hear his voice - **(29)** And they will come out; the ones who did good things into the resurrection of life, but the ones who practiced wickedness into the resurrection of judgment. **(30)** *I am not able to do anything on my own*; as I hear I judge, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of the One who sent me."

(31) If I witness concerning myself, my witness is not true. **(32)** There is another (Yahya) who witnesses concerning me, and I am certain that his witnessing concerning me is true. **(33)** You have sent (messengers) to Yahya and he has testified to the truth. **(34)** Yet I don't (need to) receive testimony from a human being, but these things I say so that you may be saved. **(35)** He (Yahya) was a burning and shining lamp, and you wanted to rejoice for a while in his light. **(36)** But I have a greater witness than Yahya - *the works* which the Father has given to me to complete - the works themselves which I do witness concerning me - that the Father has sent me. **(37)** And the Father who sent me *Himself* has testified concerning me; neither His voice have you ever heard, nor have you seen His form. **(38)** And His message you don't have abiding in (your hearts), because you don't believe the one that He sent! **(39)** You research the Scriptures (closely) because you think that in them you have eternal life, but those (Scriptures) are testifiers concerning me! **(40)** But you don't want to come to me to have (eternal) life!

(41) I don't receive glory from human beings. **(42)** But I know you; you do not have the (special) love (*agapistis*) of Allah in yourselves. **(43)** I have come in the Name of my Father, but you don't receive me. If another comes in his own name, *him* you will receive! **(44)** How are you even *able* to believe (while)

⁶⁵⁸ [Q]و يوم القيامة يكون عليهم شهيدا) "And on the Day of Judgment he (Jesus) will be a witness against them" (4:159.9)]

receiving glory from each other, but the glory that comes from the *one and only* Allah⁶⁵⁹, you don't seek? (45) Don't think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Musa, the one upon whom you have placed your hopes. (46) For if you believed in Musa, you would believe in me, for he wrote about me. (47) But if you don't believe in his writings, how will you believe in my words?"

The Messiah as a Reflection of God

The above verses (5:19-30) represent the heart of John's theo-christological teaching for the Muslim exegete. I believe the inspired evangelist wrote it to resemble a Socratic dialogue between Christ and his Pharisaic interlocutors to both appeal to the Gospel's initial audiences, but also, and again ironically, to present the basis for *polemirenic* engagement with the Gospel for the (Muslim) unitarian (موحد) interpreter in the face of Trinitarian exegetical opposition. In other words, just as (some of) the Jewish authorities have grossly misunderstood Jesus' statements with respect to his "work" on the Sabbath and thus charge him with blasphemy, future Christians will also misunderstand him but insist his "blasphemy" is justified since Jesus is *essentially* God. Jesus is, in the words of the Jewish New Testament scholar Levine, "*the misunderstood Jew*."⁶⁶⁰ Barrett says: "It is simply intolerable that Jesus should be made to say, 'I am God, the supreme God of the Old Testament, and being God I do as I am told.'"⁶⁶¹ However, it is *Jesus himself* who provides the refutation of both of these theo-christological conclusions in these few verses. Christ prefaces his comments with the familiar and emphatic, "Indeed I say unto you" (Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν); a phrase that was last used by Christ in John 3 when he was speaking to Nicodemus (three times [3:3, 5, 11]) - leading up to what I called the "theological crescendo" of that conversation, John

⁶⁵⁹ "One and only Allah:" τοῦ μόνου θεοῦ; hence "monotheism."

⁶⁶⁰ See: Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).

⁶⁶¹ C.K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (SPCK, 1982), 12.

3:16. This preamble of Christ in the Gospel is similar to the Qur'anic "O ye who believe..." (يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا), used countless times in the text and signifying a proceeding statement of extreme importance, according to Ibn 'Abbas. Identical to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, the argument of Christ presented in John 5:19-30 contains this phrase (Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν) three times as well. Christ then confesses that "the (unique) Son," the Messiah, has no intrinsic power/ability "to do anything" (ποιεῖν οὐδέν) "by himself" (ἑαυτοῦ); but only does what he "sees" the Father doing (5:19). This is the main argument which will be supported by several subsequent statements. After "seeing" (مشاهدة) the Father, the Son does these things, but "in a similar way" (ὁμοίως) - not in the *exact* or *same* way.⁶⁶² This is again related to the Sufi idea that the sanctified saint or prophet mimics God in his actions; that he acts only in perfect accordance with the well-pleasing will of the Almighty, who is the real source of all power. The saint or prophet mirrors God because his ego, the "veil," is no longer important to him, or has fallen out completely. Al-Ghazali says:

"A rusty mirror will not reflect an image. However, when the rust is removed and the mirror polished, an image can appear in it, not by any movement of the image towards it nor by its movement towards the image. The image is now apparent because of the removal of that which had veiled it.

Then it will appear as if God is in the soul as the image in the mirror. When suddenly God Self-discloses in the mirror of the soul, you are quick to say that He is on the inside of the soul itself and that human nature has taken on the divine nature. Then you persevere until God enhances you with the Firm Word ([بِالْقَوْلِ الثَّابِتِ] Q 14:27), so that you know that the image is not really inside the mirror, but only reflected in it.

If the image were to be actually inside the mirror, it would not be possible for it to reflect on many mirrors at one and the same time. Instead it would be that when it is inside one mirror, it has moved there from another mirror. This, however, is

⁶⁶² The Greek word here (5:19), ὁμοίως, provided the proof-text for the Homoeans, i.e. the Father and Son are "alike" (somehow), and also avoids the unscriptural and highly controversial "*ousia*." See: Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 118.

not the case because God Self-discloses to many of the knowers (gnostics) at one and the same time. He Self-discloses to some mirrors of the soul more completely, in a more direct and clearer manner, and to others more mysteriously and indirectly. This difference is because the mirror has become clear of rust, polished, perfected in shape and correct in the width of its surface. This is why the Prophet said: God Self-disclosed to the people in general and to Abu Bakr in particular.”⁶⁶³

The soul of the Messiah is clear of rust (تخلية), polished (تحلية), and perfected (تجلية). Thus just as God “raises the dead and gives life,” that is, creates life out of nothing (*ex nihilo*; Heb. יָרָא מֵאֵין, Arab. من عدم), Jesus “gives life” to the both physically and spiritually dead through his teaching, example, and dynamological miracles (كرمات [charismata]) “by God’s leave and power” (بإذن الله [Q 3:49]). This is how Christ is “like” (ομοιος) God. Christ says that just as the Father has life “in Himself” (ἐν ἑαυτῷ), the Son has life “in himself” (ἐν ἑαυτῷ); notice the same wording. However, the key is that the latter (life) is *given* (ἔδωκεν) to the Son by the Father, who is thus the source of all life (v. 26). Christ acts “as if” God because he is purified mirror of God’s attributes and actions. Also, as God is the ultimate judge of all, the Son is given “permission” (ἐξουσίαν) to make judgments because he is the Son of Man (v. 27). Jesus then confirms for his opponents that he will fulfill the important messianic function of raising the dead (תְּחִיית הַמֵּתִים) [*t’khiyyat ha-maytim*] in the coming kingdom (v. 27-28).⁶⁶⁴ Paul intimates this “mystery” (μυστήριον) or secret⁶⁶⁵ or “godliness/divinity” (εὐσέβεια) in 1 Tim. 3:16. But

⁶⁶³ Al-Ghazali, *Jewels of the Quran (Jawahir al-Qur’an)*, edited and translated by Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2011), 17-18.

⁶⁶⁴ According to Maimonides in his *Commentary upon the Mishnah (Sanhedrin, 10)*, the Messiah will 1) Restore the kingdom of David 2) Rebuilt the Temple (*Bayt HaMiqdash*) 3) Gather the exiles from Diaspora (*Gelyot*) 4) Command the Torah to be followed 5) Fight the wars of the Lord (*Milchamot Adonai*) 6) Usher in an era of world peace. Other rabbinical authorities add that the Messiah will raise the dead of Israel during his reign.

⁶⁶⁵ In the Textus Receptus 1 Tim 3:16.5 reads “God (θεος) was manifested in the flesh...,” while the more accurate and ancient authorities (such as א), read, “Who (ος) was manifested in the flesh.” See Metzger for possible reasons why the relative pronoun was changed to the *nomen sacrum* (ΘC) for God (θεος); cf. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 573-574.

how would Christ's *likeness* to God square with the Qur'an's statement: "There is not like the likes of Him anything, while He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing" (Q 42:11.5)? Mayer says, "Although the verse is routinely taken to underscore God's transcendence of all comparison, Ibn 'Arabi points out that not one but two 'likening' words occur in this Arabic sentence. It literally says: 'There is nothing like (*ka*) His likeness (*mithlihi*).' The expression thus actually affirms God's likeness, but denies that that likeness is in any way commensurate with anything else. 'God's likeness' according to Ibn 'Arabi, is the Perfect Man."⁶⁶⁶ Thus Christ as the Perfect Man (الإنسان الكامل) is "like" (ομοιος) God. Christ is a sanctified theomorphic creature, yet no one in existence is "like" (ك) *him* - he is *monogenes*, one of a kind.⁶⁶⁷

All of this is possible because "the Father *intimately* loves the Son" (ὁ γὰρ πατὴρ φιλεῖ τὸν υἱὸν [5:20.1]) - a *philiagapsis* through which Christ has been perfected in God's attributes, his ego annihilated (فنى) in God's character, and has thus become His "image" upon the earth. As mentioned earlier, according to Junayd, this exalted state of union is described by God in the famous hadith *qudsi*: "My servant draws near unto Me by means of nothing more dear to Me than his obligatory actions. Then he continues to draw near unto Me with his supererogatory actions *until I love him* (حتى احبه). And when I love him, I become his ear by which he hears, his eye with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask something of Me, I would surely give it to him."⁶⁶⁸ And finally, with respect to Christ's "equality" (ἴσον)

⁶⁶⁶ Toby Mayer, "Theology and Sufism," in *Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter. ed., 282-283 citing Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus al-hikam*, ed. Abu'l-'Ala 'Afifi (Beirut, 1365/1946), 111.

⁶⁶⁷ This comment must be understood in the context that Christ is the greatest Israelite prophet; no other, not even Moses compares to him.

⁶⁶⁸ *Hadith* of Bukhari.

with God, Christ clarifies in verses 23-24 that this is only on the level of honor (τιμάω), dishonor (ἀτιμάζω), obedience (ἀκούω), and disobedience (μὴ φυλάξῃ), so that “all who honor the Son, also honors the Father” (ἵνα πάντες τιμῶσι τὸν υἱὸν καθὼς τιμῶσι τὸν πατέρα) and “the one who dishonors the Son, dishonors the Father” (ὁ μὴ τιμῶν τὸν υἱὸν οὐ τιμᾷ τὸν πατέρα), and that the one who “obeys” his “message” will have eternal life, because obeying Christ *is* obeying God - “Whoever obeys the Messenger, is indeed obeying God” (مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ [Q 4:80]). Jesus concludes his argument in v. 30 just as he began it in v. 19, by virtually repeating the same statement about the Son’s inability to do anything *intrinsically*. This time, however, Christ is even more emphatic as he replaces the impersonal “the Son” with “I.” Οὐ δύναμαι ἐγὼ ποιεῖν ἅπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐδέν. We may summarize Christ’s symmetrical argument with the following diagram:

EMPHASIS 1: Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν...

***MAIN ARGUMENT:** οὐ δύναται ὁ υἱὸς ποιεῖν ἅφ’ ἐαυτοῦ οὐδέν (v.19)

SUPPORT STATEMENT 1: ἃ γὰρ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ποιῇ ταῦτα καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ὁμοίως ποιεῖ (v.19)

REASON: ὁ γὰρ πατήρ φιλεῖ τὸν υἱὸν (v.20)

CLARIFYING STATEMENT 1: ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ἐγείρει τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ ζωοποιεῖ οὕτως καὶ ὁ υἱὸς οὓς θέλει ζωοποιεῖ (v.21)

SUPPORT STATEMENT 2: οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ πατήρ κρίνει οὐδένα ἀλλὰ τὴν κρίσιν πᾶσαν δέδωκεν τῷ υἱῷ (v.22)

CLARIFYING STATEMENT 2: ἵνα πάντες τιμῶσι τὸν υἱὸν καθὼς τιμῶσι τὸν πατέρα ὁ μὴ τιμῶν τὸν υἱὸν οὐ τιμᾷ τὸν πατέρα τὸν πέμψαντα αὐτόν (v.23)

EMPHASIS 2: Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν...

CLARIFYING STATEMENT 2: ὅτι ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον... (v.24)

EMPHASIS 3: ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν...

CONFIRMATION: ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν ὅτε οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσονται τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀκούσαντες ζήσονται (v.25)

SUPPORT STATEMENT 3: ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ἔχει ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ οὕτως ἔδωκεν καὶ τῷ υἱῷ ζωὴν ἔχειν ἐν ἑαυτῷ... (v.26)

SUPPORT STATEMENT 4: καὶ ἐξουσίαν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ καὶ κρίσιν ποιεῖν ὅτι υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν (v.27)

CONFIRMATION: μὴ θαυμάζετε τοῦτο ὅτι ἔρχεται ὥρα ἐν ἣ πάντες οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις ἀκούσονται τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἐκπορεύσονται οἱ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς οἱ δὲτὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως (v.28-29)

***MAIN ARGUMENT REPEATED: Οὐ δύναμαι ἐγὼ ποιεῖν ἀπ' ἑμαυτοῦ οὐδέν (v.30)**

SUPPORT STATEMENT 5: καθὼς ἀκούω κρίνω καὶ ἡ κρίσις ἡ ἐμὴ δικαία ἐστίν ὅτι οὐ ζητῶ τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἐμὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με πατρός (v.30)

The Fourth Sign: The Feeding of Five Thousand; 'Isa Mistaken for the Prophet

Chapter Six: (1) After these (events), 'Isa went across the Sea of Galilee, (also known as the Sea) of Tiberias. (2) And a great crowd was following him because they saw the signs which he was doing for the sick and feeble. (3) So 'Isa went up on the mountain and sat there with his disciples. (4) And the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. (5) Therefore when 'Isa raised his eyes and saw that a great crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread so that these (people) might eat?" (6) But this he said testing him, for he already knew what he was about to do. (7) Philip answered him, "Two-hundred silver coins' worth of bread is not enough for each (person) to receive a little!" (8) One of his disciples, Andrew the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, (9) "There is a young boy here who has five (loaves of) barley bread and two fish, but what (good) are these things among so many?" (10) 'Isa said, "Make the people sit down." - And there was much grass in the place. Therefore, the men,⁶⁶⁹ whose number was about five thousand, sat down. (11) Then 'Isa took the bread, and after he had given thanks (to Allah), he distributed them to those reclining (to eat), and similarly from the fish, as much as they wanted (to eat). (12) When they were satiated, he said to his disciples, "Gather the leftover pieces, so that nothing is lost." (13) So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were leftover by those who had eaten. (14) When the people saw the miracle that he did, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (15) Therefore, having known that they were about to come and compel him to make him a king, 'Isa withdrew again to the mountain; (this time) by himself alone.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁹ In this verse, the evangelist uses ἀνθρώπους (people) initially then the more specific ἄνδρες (men), although these terms can be used interchangeably. In my view, however, the purpose of the latter is to be "in contrast to women" (BGAD, 66). The Disciples gave the bread and fish to the men who distributed the food to their respective families (women and children), perhaps to uphold *halakic negiah* laws.

⁶⁷⁰ Imam al-Ghazali relates: "It was once narrated that Jesus passed by a skull, and said to it, 'By the permission of God, speak!' Speaking, the skull said, "O Spirit of God, I was king during such and such a time, presiding over my kingdom, seated on my throne with my crown upon my head and with my soldiers and servants around me. Suddenly the Angel of Death appeared before me, and at that moment every rein

*Water became firm earth under the soles of Jesus;
The moribund earth was quickened by his pure breath.
- ‘Attar, Mosibat-nama⁶⁷¹*

*Then like Jesus,
You’ll walk on water,
Accompany the sun,
Pace by the moon!
- Sana’i, Hadiqat al-haqiqah⁶⁷²*

The Fifth Sign: Walking on Water

(16) When evening arrived, his disciples went down to the Sea (of Galilee), (17) embarked upon a boat, and were crossing the sea into Capernaum. And it had already become dark, and not yet had 'Isa returned to them. (18) And the sea grew rough because a great wind was blowing. (19) Having rowed twenty-five or thirty *stadions*, they saw 'Isa walking on the sea and getting close to the boat, so they were terrified. (20) He said to them, “It’s me! Don’t be afraid.” (21) Therefore they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was upon the land towards which they were going.

The disciples’ attempt to cross the sea “in the evening” (ὥρα), *without Jesus* indicates that they are still novices upon the spiritual path, and like Nicodemus before them, no manner of “rowing” will avail them if they do not follow Christ, the light which shows them the way. The evangelist’s major theme of “walking” is continued here, as Jesus, the true spiritual Master (مرشد), indicates his mastery of the spiritual path (طريقة), which includes the (mastery of the) lower-self (نفس or هوى), represented by the wind, and the sacred law (شريعة) by performing a miraculous feat: walking on (ἐπὶ) water. According to a *hadith* of Jesus, on the authority of Muhammad, such mastery over the elements can only be achieved by expelling out of one’s heart all desire for worldly possession, so that “stone, clay, and gold” become equal in one’s eyes. As we saw with

of power was taken from me, and my soul left me and went to Him. Now I wish that what I felt in those great gatherings had been a sense of separation, and that the intimacy I experienced had instead been a sense of seclusion.” Quoted from Hamza Yusuf, *Walk of Water*, no. 80, pg. 24.

⁶⁷¹ Quoted from Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 54.

⁶⁷² *ibid*, 54.

the first sign at the wedding in Cana, water represents the sacred law, and Jesus is the true teacher of the law in the sense that he is “upon” (ἐπὶ) it - a Master of it. According to Ibn Malik, the preposition ‘*ala* (على), meaning “upon” (Gr. ἐπὶ) can be used to denote mastery (تمكن) if the following noun is abstract (or concrete with an abstract meaning).⁶⁷³ Thus the Qur’an says about Muhammad: “And indeed you are upon (على) magnanimous character (خلق),” meaning that the Prophet is a Master of ethics and a paragon of virtue. In fact, Paul uses this preposition in much of the same way in Romans 9:5 to indicate Christ’s superiority “over” the patriarchs (ἐπὶ πάντων). With respect specifically to sacred law, the Qur’an says: “Then We put you *upon* a sacred law from the affair (of religion)” (ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ [Q 45:18]), meaning that the Prophet Muhammad masters the sacred law - he walks on water. The Disciples, presumably thinking him to be an apparition, are terrified, but Jesus assures them, “It’s me! Don’t be afraid” (Εγώ εἰμι μὴ φοβεῖσθε). Jesus crosses the sea of the *sharia* and sits upon the edge of another sea known as *haqiqah*, much like al-Khidr who was discovered by Moses at “junction of the two seas” (مَجْمَعُ الْبَحْرَيْنِ [Q 18:60.5]). Christ’s “ship,” as it were, is the new Ark of Noah that carries its riders to spiritual salvation amidst the floods of error and sin, and assists its riders negotiate the difficult waves of the law as well as the obstructing influence of man’s caprice (wind). As soon as Jesus is at the helm, the wind dies, the waves become calm, and “immediately (εὐθέως) the boat was upon the land towards which they were going” (John 6:21). By Gospel’s end, however, Jesus is now envisioned as the “new Jonah,” who must now *disembark* his ship, leaving his Disciples behind momentarily, to save his nation from *physical* obliteration.

⁶⁷³ See: *Alfiyyah* Ibn Malik.

'Isa: The Spiritual Bread and Means to Eternal Life

(22) The next day, when the crowd which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there except the one that the disciples had entered and that Jesus did not go with them, but that his disciples had gone alone - (23) Other boats came from Tiberias near the place where they had eaten the bread, when the Master had given thanks (to Allah). (24) So when the crowd noticed that neither 'Isa nor his disciples were there, they embarked upon the boats and came to Capernaum seeking 'Isa. (25) And finding him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" (26) 'Isa answered them and said, "Indeed, I say to you: You are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the bread and were filled. (27) Don't work for *perishing* food, but for the (spiritual) food that *remains* for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for it is him whom Allah the Father has marked with a seal (of approval). (28) Therefore they said to him, "What must we do to carry out the works of Allah (as well)?⁶⁷⁴ (29) 'Isa answered and said to them, "This is the work of Allah: that you believe in the one whom He sent!" (30) Then they said to him, "What sign are you going to do so we can see (it) and believe you?⁶⁷⁵ What will you do? (31) Our fathers ate manna in the desert, as it is written, 'Bread from heaven he (Moses) gave them to eat.'" (32) Therefore 'Isa said to them, "Indeed, I say to you: Moses didn't give you the bread from heaven, but my Father (did), (and now) He gives you the *true* bread from heaven! (33) For the (true) bread of Allah is that which descends from heaven and gives (*eternal*) life to the world."

Johannine Double Meaning: Muhammadan Typology?

Given Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq's (d. 148/765) view that Scripture contains four levels of meaning (expression [لفظ], allusions [اشارات], subtleties [لطائف], and realities [حقائق]),⁶⁷⁶ the Sufi interpreter of the above verses (6:1-27) may see something of a "subtle" Muhammadan typology or foreshadowing in the actions and speech of Christ, in addition to the obvious Mosaic "allusion" of Christ on a "mountain" (ὄρος). Muhammad also received his divine call while up on a mountain (جبل), and one of his most oft-

⁶⁷⁴ The crowd wants to imitate Jesus by also doing the "works of God."

⁶⁷⁵ While Christ defines the "work of God" as πιστεύετε εἰς ὃν ἀπέστειλεν ἐκεῖνος ("that you believe in the one whom He sent!") [John 6:29.5-9]), with the preposition εἰς + an accusative denoting complete faith and unconditional trust, the evangelist tells us that the crowd was prepared to tentatively accept the claims of Christ *if* he worked another sign, hence the dative *soi* in πιστεύσωμέν σοι (John 6:30.9).

⁶⁷⁶ Quoted from: *Spiritual Gems: The Mystical Qur'an Commentary Ascribed to Ja'far al-Sadiq as Contained in Sulami's Haqa'iq al-Tafsir*, trans. by Farhana Mayer (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011), 1.

repeated miracles mentioned in *hadith* literature, was his ability to increase food or cause water to flow from his fingertips by God's leave. Most interestingly, the evangelist makes his second mention of "the Prophet" here in chapter six, a figure identified earlier as the eschatological prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18, the prophet like Moses. We are told that when the people saw the sign, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (Οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ προφήτης ὃ ἐρχόμενος εἰς τὸν κόσμον), but Jesus, knowing that he would not *yet* be a Moses-like "king" (βασιλέα) of a physical and earthly kingdom, "withdrew again to the mountain" (ἀνεχώρησεν πάλιν εἰς τὸ ὄρος). Finally, in this regard, after Christ begins a new motif involving food that "perishes" and "remains," he reveals that "the Son of Man" will give the Israelites the latter, leading to eternal life, "for God, the Father, *has marked him with a seal*" (γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ἐσφράγισεν ὁ θεός [6:27]). It is obvious that Jesus is referring to himself here as "the Son of Man" just as he did in four prior verses in the Gospel (John 1:51; 3:13,14; 5:27), and that by "seal" he means a seal of approval - that Christ is confirmed or authenticated by God, "endued with power from heaven,"⁶⁷⁷ or even "sealed" for security from Satan.⁶⁷⁸ However, if the evangelist is in fact also foreshadowing the Prophet Muhammad, then the nature of this "sealing" as a physical manifestation between his shoulder blades, and thus the subject of an entire chapter of al-Tirmidhi's *Shamma'il*,⁶⁷⁹ as well as its metaphysical meaning that he is the last or "seal" of all prophecy, as in Q 33:40.5 (خَاتَمُ النَّبِيِّينَ) presents itself to the Muslim reader. According to Thayer, the Greek verb used here and in the Septuagint meaning "to seal" (σφραγίζω) is *khatam* (חתם) in Hebrew; it is from the very same

⁶⁷⁷ BDAG, 796.

⁶⁷⁸ "Denotes ownership also carries w. it the protection of the owner" (BDAG, 796).

⁶⁷⁹ See: Imam Abu 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, "Chapter of what is related about the Seal of Prophecy" (باب ما جاء في خاتم النبوة) in *Shamaail Tirmidhi*, translated by Muhammad b. 'Aburrahman Ebrahim, 19-21 for Arabic text.

triliteral root of *khatam* (ختم) used in the *Shamma'il* and Qur'an (33:40) mentioned above.

In a passage that Muslims should find familiar, Isaiah says:

וַתְּהִי לָכֶם חֲזוֹן הַכָּל כְּדִבְרֵי הַסֵּפֶר הַחֲתוּם אֲשֶׁר־יִתְּנוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל־יְדוּעֵי הַסֵּפֶר לֵאמֹר קְרָא נָא־נָה וְאָמַר לֹא אוּכַל כִּי חֲתוּם הוּא

“And the vision of all (things) will come to you as the words of the *sealed book* which they will give to one who is lettered saying, ‘Read this!’ But he shall say, ‘I am not able, for it is sealed.’”

וְנָתַן הַסֵּפֶר עַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע סֵפֶר לֵאמֹר קְרָא נָא־נָה וְאָמַר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי סֵפֶר

“And the book will be given to one who does not know letters saying, ‘Read this!’⁶⁸⁰ But he will say. ‘I do not know letters.’” - Isaiah 29:11-12.

(34) So they said to him, “Master, always give to us this bread!” (35) 'Isa said to them, “I am the bread of (eternal) life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me (unconditionally) *will never be thirsty*.⁶⁸¹ (36) But I said to you that you have seen me, but don't believe (in me unconditionally). (37) Everything which the Father is giving to me will come to me, and the one who comes to me, I will never cast out (reject). (38) Because I have come down from heaven not in order to do my own will, but the will of the One who sent me. (39) And this is the will of the One who has sent me: That I lose nothing of all He has given to me, but raise it up on the last day. (40) For this is the will of my Father: That everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

(41) Therefore the Jewish authorities were grumbling about him because he said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” (42) And they said, “This is 'Isa, the son of Yusuf, whose father and mother we know well, isn't he? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” (43) 'Isa answered and said to them, “Don't grumble among yourselves. (44) No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him (to me), and I will raise him up on the last day. (45) It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by Allah.’ Everyone who has listened to the Father and learned from Him, comes to me. (46) Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the one being from Allah; this one has seen the Father. (47) Indeed, I say to you: The one who believes has eternal life. (48) I am the bread of (eternal) life. (49) Your forefathers ate manna in the desert and died. (50) *This* is the bread that comes down from heaven so that anyone may eat of it and not die! (51) I am the living bread which has come down from heaven; if anyone eats from this bread, he will live forever, and the bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

⁶⁸⁰ The Hebrew for “read” (קָרָא) is the exact cognate of the Arabic “*igra*” (اقرأ) used in the famous *hadith* of Bukhari in which Gabriel commanded the Prophet to read and marking the commencement of the Qur'an's Revelation (تنزيل) from the Firmament (السماء الدنيا) to the sacred prophetic heart (قلب); cf. Q 96:1-5. Of course the Prophet's response was, “I am not a reader” (ما أنا بقارئ).

⁶⁸¹ This is: οὐ μὴ διψήσῃ πώποτε, an intensive negation of the future active indicative verb linked with the adverb *popote* at the end.

(52) Therefore the Jewish authorities quarreled among themselves saying, “How can this (man) give us his flesh to eat?” (53) So 'Isa said to them, “Indeed, I say to you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don’t have (eternal) life within yourselves. (54) The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (55) For my flesh is *true* food, and my blood is *true* drink. (56) The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. (57) Just as the Living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, the one who eats me - that one will live because of me.⁶⁸² (58) This is the bread which has come down from heaven, not as the forefathers ate and died (a spiritual death). The one who eats this bread will live forever.” (59) He said these things while teaching in the *synagogue* in Capernaum.

“Consuming” Christ as a Metaphor for Complete Faith

It is crucially important to keep in mind that the above statements were made by Christ “while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum” (ἐν συναγωγῇ διδάσκων ἐν Καπερναούμ). Jesus was a *Rabbi* and he was teaching *Judaism*. Borgen says that “Jewish mysticism” provides the backdrop for John 6.⁶⁸³ Notice also that the “grumbling” of the Jewish authorities was not due to Jesus stating that he will raise people up on the last day, for this is what the Messiah will do prior to the *Olam HaBa* according to their own messianism. Rather their grumbling was a reaction to his statement, Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ καταβὰς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (v.41). And as we saw earlier, all of the highly mystical “I am” statements must be delimited by the foundational John 4:26; it is the initial “I am” statement which defines them as *messianic* claims, yet also demonstrates the very intimate relationship between the God and His Messiah, as well as the Messiah’s exalted station as a perfected agent of God upon the earth. As I stated earlier, τροφή (طعام) and βρωσις (قوت) are used by John to denote physical and spiritual food respectively, although the latter may also be taken literally according to *context*. However, in v. 27,

⁶⁸² The implication is that Jesus has “eaten” the Father!

⁶⁸³ Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Brill, 1965).

Jesus distinguishes between “perishing food” (τὴν βρωσιν τὴν ἀπολλυμένην) and “remaining food” (τὴν βρωσιν τὴν μένουσαν); the former a type of طعام and the latter قوت, or we may say “perishing food” (قوت فان) and “remaining food” (قوت باق). The former was given to their forefathers in the desert, yet they died a spiritual death due to their worship of the golden calf. Interesting, the Qur’an uses the verb *ashraba* (اشرب), literally meaning “to cause to drink” (passive voice), when describing this event: “They said ‘We hear and we disobey,’ so they were made to *drink* into their hearts (the love) of the calf because of their disbelief” (قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَأَشْرَبُوا فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْغَجَلَ بِكُفْرِهِمْ) [Q 2:93.5]). According to Wehr, the meaning of this verb denotes “saturation, domination, and permeation;”⁶⁸⁴ thus “their hearts were saturated in the love of the calf due to their disbelief.” Lane translates: “And they were made to imbibe [into their hearts] the love of the calf.”⁶⁸⁵ But *Jesus* is the bread of life, the “remaining food,” and those who “eat” of him, shall not die but live forever. Obviously Jesus is not referring to a literal or physical immortality, since the Disciples and everyone in that synagogue have died. Just as the Father, who created physical life for all, sustained the ancient Israelites with both physical (manna) and spiritual food (Moses), yet caused their spiritual deaths *due to their sin*, Christ, the agent of the Father and *means* of spiritual life, also offers them physical (ἄρτος) as well as spiritual food (*himself*).

The “true food” and “true drink” are the flesh and blood of Christ, and the one who partakes of these will inherit true life. But how does one eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ? Is not the drinking of blood forbidden? - “an everlasting statute” (תָּקַת עוֹלָם [Lev. 3:17.1]) It is *believing* in him totally and completely; it is to be completely

⁶⁸⁴ Wehr, 540.

⁶⁸⁵ Lane, 1526.

saturated, permeated, and dominated by the love of Christ and earnest striving towards the *imitatio Christi*. The key to understanding this concept is given in v. 53: “Just as the *Living* Father sent me and *I live* because of the Father, the one who eats me - that one will live because of me” (καθὼς ἀπέστειλέν με ὁ ζῶν πατήρ καὶ γὰρ ζῶ διὰ τὸν πατέρα καὶ ὁ τρώγων με καὶ κεῖνος ζήσεται δι’ ἐμέ). Jesus qualifies the Father with the adjectival participle “Living” (ζῶν) while stating that he (only) “lives” (ζῶ), a present tense verb, “because of the Father” (διὰ τὸν πατέρα). The Father is intrinsically “The Living” (الحي), the active participle (اسم فاعل) of the qualitative attribute of life (حياة). The Father is the source of all life, including the life of Christ.⁶⁸⁶ However, when we “eat” (φάγω) Christ, that is to say, believe in him whole-heartedly, as Christ whole-heartedly believes in the Father, then we also will live “because of” (διὰ) Christ. We will be united “in Christ Jesus” (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ [1 Cor. 1:2.5]), a phrase used one hundred and sixty-four times by Paul alone in order to denote a mystical union that believers enjoy with Jesus. While this analogy is strange and “offensive” (σκληρός), it is not unprecedented. The Prophet Ezekiel was ordered by God to do the following: “Son of Man! Eat whatever you find; eat this scroll, then go and speak to the house of Israel” (בְּנֵאֲדָם אַתְּ אֶת-אֲשֶׁר-תִּמְצָא אֲכֹל אֲכֹל אֶת- (Ezekiel 3:1.5-9]); And David wrote: “How sweet are Your Words to my palate, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (מִה-נִמְלֵצוּ לִפְתִּי אִמְרֹתֶיךָ מִדְּבַשׁ (Psalms 119:103]). The LXX uses the phrase υἱὲ ἀνθρώπου (vocative) meaning, “Son of Man,” which is very similar to how Christ describes himself in the very scandalous v. 53 (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), which leads me to believe that Christ may have had this verse in mind, and may have even been giving a mystical *midrash* of not only Exodus but

⁶⁸⁶ According to Arabic grammar, the participle (اسم فاعل), in contrast to the verb (فعل), denotes the quiddity of a thing and is not constrained by temporality.

Ezekiel 3. Ezekiel did not literally eat the scroll (הַמִּגִּלָּה, المجلة), he rather “consumed” the words of God, its meanings, internalized them, practiced them, then taught them to others. Thus he became a great source of spiritual growth for his people. Ernst notes, “More than one author has observed that recitation of the Qur’an is comparable to the Christian ritual of the Eucharist, as a process of internalizing the word of God.”⁶⁸⁷ Christ is the λόγος of God, His special decree for Israel, and the greatest of the Israelite prophets. Those who receive his message must eat him completely, not selectively, nor abhor any aspect of him - *flesh and blood and all*.

In Q 19:25, we are told that Mary was given a spring of water (سريا) underneath her as well as fresh ripe dates (رطباً جنياً) *from above* which fall upon her. I believe that the spring symbolizes Jesus, “the living waters,” while the dates symbolize Jesus as the “bread (food) having come down from heaven,” the latter of which is mentioned in this difficult “Eucharistic” passage (John 6) and represents, in my view, yet another key intertextual interface between the *Injil* and the Qur’an. In the Wisdom literature of the Tanakh and Apocrypha, wisdom (חכמה) itself is personified and says: “Come eat of my bread and drink the wine which I have mingled” (Proverbs 9:5-6); “Those who eat of me will hunger still; those who drink of me will thirst for more” (Sirach 24:21). In the former verse, the word for “bread” is *lehem* (לֶחֶם), and the Gospel as well as the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad⁶⁸⁸ agree that Jesus was born in “the House of Bread” (Bethlehem). Jesus is the very wisdom of God personified - “And He (God) will teach Jesus Revelation and *Wisdom*...” (حكمة [Q 3:48]). The latter is taken by many Sufi exegetes to represent

⁶⁸⁷ Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an*, 60, citing John Renard, *Seven Doors to Islam: Spirituality and the Religious Life of Muslims* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 39.

⁶⁸⁸ *Hadith* of al-Nasa’i.

Ihsan/tasawwuf/Irfan, spiritual excellence, or rather the spiritual path, the *Via Christi*.

Jesus “coming down from heaven” simply means he is a “good gift” (δóσις ἀγαθῇ) from God and a manifestation of divine wisdom (σοφία), according to James 1:17, 3:15, for all “good gifts” are “from above and come down from the Father” (ἄνωθεν ἐστὶν καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς). Therefore according to Coloe, and I agree with her, “eating bread,” or rather eating Jesus’ flesh, means to dedicate oneself completely to his *way of wisdom*, while drinking his blood means to embrace his life, since blood is the life force of a person or animal.⁶⁸⁹ According to Coloe, this is a great *zikkar*, remembrance (ذكر) of Jesus.⁶⁹⁰ Junayd said: “The Sufi is like the sky which shades all, and like the rain from which all are given to drink.”⁶⁹¹ A voice beneath Mary commands her: “Eat and drink, and be joyous!” (فكلي واشربي وقرى عينا [Q:26.1]). Mary is being commanded to embrace her son in every conceivable way.

Total “consumption” of Christ is represented by belief in his words and total trust in him. Therefore, we notice an abundance of verses in John 6 that employ the verb πιστεύω and its participle forms:

(29) “This is the work of Allah: that you believe (πιστεύσητε) in the one whom He sent!”
(35) ‘Isa said to them, “I am the bread of (eternal) life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes (πιστεύων) in me will never be thirsty.
(36) But I said to you that you have seen me, but don’t believe (πιστεύετε).
(40) For this is the will of my Father: That everyone who sees the Son and believes (πιστεύων) in him may have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
(47) Indeed, I say to you: The one who believes (πιστεύων) in me has eternal life.
(64) But there are some of you who don’t believe (πιστεύουσιν). For ‘Isa knew from (the) beginning (he knew Allah’s decree) who were the ones who didn’t believe (πιστεύοντες) and who was going to betray him.

⁶⁸⁹ Mary L. Coloe, P.B.V.M., *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 2001), 65-84.

⁶⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁶⁹¹ (الصوفي كالارض يطأها البر والفاجر وكالسماء يظل كل شيء وكالمطر يسقي كل شيء) Quoted from: Ahmad ibn ‘Ajība, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 3.

(69) And we have come to believe (πεπιστεύκαμεν) and to know that you are the sanctified one of Allah!"

A Difficult and Advanced Teaching Explained

(60) Having heard this (teaching), many of his disciples said, "This statement (about his flesh and blood) is offensive⁶⁹²; who is able to listen to him (and understand)? (61) And knowing well within himself that his disciples were grumbling about this (statement), 'Isa said to them, "Does this offend you?" (62) What about if you see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? (63) The Spirit is the (eternal) life giver; the flesh will achieve nothing. The words which I have spoken to you are spirit (spiritual) and life (everlasting). (64) But there are some of you who don't believe. For 'Isa knew from (the) beginning (he knew Allah's decree) who were the ones who didn't believe and who was the one who was going to betray him. (65) Then he said, "For this reason I have said to you that no one is able to come to me unless it is given to him by the Father."

(66) Due to this, many of his disciples went back to "the things that they had left behind," and no longer walked with him (on the spiritual path). (67) So 'Isa said to the twelve, "You don't also want to leave, do you?" (68) Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. (69) And we have come to believe and to know that you are the sanctified one of Allah!" (70) 'Isa answered them, "I chose you twelve, didn't I? Yet one of you is a devil!" (71) And he meant Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. For he, one of the twelve, was about to betray him.

Some of the Disciples deemed Jesus' teaching in the synagogue offensive and wonder if anyone could really listen to him because they seem to have made the error of taking his words quite literally, ironically again, like many Christian exegetes. Jesus asks them, "(Why) does this offend you?" (Τοῦτο ὑμᾶς σκανδαλίζει), wondering why they are being so literal in their interpretations since he has said *nothing* at all blasphemous. *His analogy is Jewish to the core*. The Disciples will see his ascension, so how would they possibly eat and drink him literally? The teaching was advanced and hard to grasp, but certainly not *truly* offensive. Then for good measure, he explains exactly what he meant by his "gruesome" flesh and blood teaching in v. 63: "The Spirit is the (eternal) life giver; the flesh will achieve nothing" (τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιῶν ἢ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν).

⁶⁹² Σκληρός: literally "hard, harsh, cruel," or "hard, difficult" (BDAG, 756). The Jesus Seminar translates it as "offensive."

To put it highly periphrastically: “*God* gives eternal life (since “God is Spirit” [4:24.1]) He is the source of everything; (my) flesh, in *reality*, accomplishes nothing. It was only a hyperbolic analogy.” He continues, “The words which I have spoken to you are spirit (spiritual) and life (everlasting)” (τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λαλῶ ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστιν). In other words, “My teachings about my flesh and blood are spiritual (esoteric, mysterious, figurative), not literal, and if you *believe* in my teachings, you will be given eternal life by God” for “no one is able to come to me except that it was given to him by the Father” (6:65.9). Thus Jesus explains that a literal mastication of his flesh and blood is untenable; the analogy is used to emphasize complete and submissive faith in Christ. Despite this explanation, the evangelist tells us that many of his Disciples went back to “(lit.) the things that they had left behind” (εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω) and “no longer walked with him” (καὶ οὐκέτι μετ’ αὐτοῦ περιεπάτουν). The former phrase occurs two other times in the Gospel of John (18:6 and 20:14) where the meaning denotes a physical movement either “backwards” as in Judas and a detachment of Roman soldiers, or “around” as in the case of Mary the Magdalene. Here in John 6, however, I take the meaning to be that many of his Disciples simply could not comprehend his advanced teaching so they did not progress in the spiritual path, thus they could no longer “walk” with him, or may have even apostated.

Chapter Five: From Christ's Kinsmen to Healing the Man Born Blind (7:1-9:41)

The Unbelief of 'Isa's Kinsmen

Chapter Seven: (1) After these (events), 'Isa *walked* in Galilee; for he was not wanting to walk in Judea because the Jewish authorities were seeking to kill him. (2) And the festival of the Jews, the Tabernacles, were near. (3) Therefore his kinsmen said to him, "Leave from here and go to Jerusalem so that your disciples might see your works which you do. (4) For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be in public. If you do these things, show yourself to the world! (5) For not even his kinsmen believed in him. (6) So 'Isa said to them, "My right time has not yet come, but your right time is always at hand. (7) The world is not able to hate you, but it hates me, because I witness concerning it - that its works are evil. (8) You go up to the festival; as for me, I will not go up to this festival, because my right time has not yet come." (9) After saying these things he remained in Galilee.

The "Holy House" of Christ

The "kinsmen" (lit. "brethren" [ἀδελφοί]) of Jesus are his Galilean neighbors and extended family members. Unless we take their speech as sarcastic, there appears to be a dissonance between vv. 3-4 and v. five: The kinsmen want Jesus "to go public" with his mission, yet the evangelist tells us: "For his kinsmen did not believe in him" (John 7:5). In my view, however, there is no tension nor lack of harmony between these statements. The kinsmen want Jesus to manifest himself and his work in Jerusalem because there *is* in fact an element of belief of their part, but it is only what Moloney calls "partial belief."⁶⁹³ They exhibit only a conditional acceptance of Jesus and presume to give him orders as to how to present his mission without submitting to his judgment

⁶⁹³ Moloney, SDB, *Love in the Gospel of the John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study*, 1-36.

wholeheartedly. Hence the evangelist is really telling us, “For his kinsmen did not *fully* believe (trust) in him” (οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπίστευον εἰς αὐτόν), with ἐπίστευον followed by the preposition εἰς then “him” in the accusative (αὐτόν), as opposed to “him” in the dative, which we will see again in John 8 with respect to some of Jesus’ Pharisaic opponents who are not prepared to give their full trust and allegiance to Jesus but only their momentary acceptance or intellectual assent.⁶⁹⁴ This is similar to how many of Muhammad’s kinsmen treated him as well. They were prepared to believe in the Prophet as long as he made certain concessions and adjustments to his theological and/or moral principles. The Qur’an says: “When Our clear Signs are recited to them... they say: ‘Come back with a Revelation other than this,’ or ‘Change this (Qur’an)!’” (Q 10:15.1, .5). Complete submission to God’s Sent Ones is part and parcel of “complete faith” in God and His Sent Ones: “By your Lord, they do not *really* believe (يؤمنون) until they make you the judge in their affairs, and they do not find any resistance in their souls to your judgments, *and they submit with full submission*” (يسلموا تسليماً [Q 4:65]). John 7:1-9, however, is not a condemnation of Jesus’ *entire* family any more than the Qur’an’s condemnation of the Prophet’s uncle Abu Lahab is a condemnation of the Prophet Muhammad’s entire family. On the contrary, the crucial role and exalted status of Jesus’ family for the Johannine author is at the heart of his Gospel.

In order to understand the essential teaching of the Gospel of John, one must identify the enigmatic Johannine character known as the “Beloved Disciple.” My

⁶⁹⁴ Πιστεύω is defined in many ways by the BDAG according to its usage in early Christian writings. BDAG says: “2. *believe (in)*, trust of relig. belief in a special sense, as faith in the Divinity that lays special emphasis on trust in his power and his nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that he exists and that his revelations or disclosures are true. In our lit. God and Christ are objects of this faith. The obj. is a. given - α. in the dat... β. w. εἰς” (pg. 660-661). It is my contention, however, that John consistently employs the dative and accusative objects as denoting different levels of faith in Christ.

contention is that not only does he make an appearance in the Book of Signs (1:39) as Moloney suggests, but as Eisenman⁶⁹⁵ and Tabor⁶⁹⁶ suggest, he is none other than James the Just (יעקב הצדיק), the brother of Jesus, who may also be identified as “James the son of Alphaeus” or “James the Less.” In my view, the Gospel of John represents a sacred teaching and tradition which was directly handed down by the blessed family of Jesus Christ (اهل بيت عيسى المسيح). The Gospel preserves the esoteric (باطني) and hidden meanings of Jesus’ doctrine (*didache*) as well as reveals that his teaching authority resides within his holy family/house (*domum sanctam Christi*). Just as the love and reverence of the family of the Prophet Muhammad remains the foundation of Islam (اساس الاسلام)⁶⁹⁷ and a cornerstone of Islamic spirituality, love and reverence of Jesus Christ and his family is equally foundational. Thus the Gospel of John espouses what I call *Hagioichalist*⁶⁹⁸ Christology. It is very interesting to note that we are never told the actual name of the Beloved Disciple throughout John, prompting many scholars to conjecture possible candidates, such as Thomas (Charlesworth), Lazarus (Witherington), Mary Magdalene (Jusino), the presbyter of 2 and 3 John (Schnelle)⁶⁹⁹ or the traditional view first espoused by Irenaeus (d. ca. 180 CE) and supported by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, that he is John the son of Zebedee, the brother of James the Great. The reason for this non-identification has also been the subject of much scholastic debate; perhaps the Beloved Disciple is a construct for an “ideal disciple” who represents what we as readers

⁶⁹⁵ See: Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus, The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Penguin, 1997) 464.

⁶⁹⁶ See: James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty, The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006). 240-258. For a survey of all opinions as to the identity of the Beloved Disciple, see: James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Trinity Press, 1995); cf. Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 72-88.

⁶⁹⁷ *Hadith* recorded in the *Forty* (الأربعين) of Imam al-Kattani (أساس الإسلام حبي وحب أهل بيتي).

⁶⁹⁸ Neologism from *hagios* (holy, sacred) and *oikos* (house).

⁶⁹⁹ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 736.

of John must strive toward? - similar to Luke's "Lover of Allah," Theophilus (Θεόφιλος, Luke 1:3), and that this is the reason why he is not named - he is a nonhistorical symbol. However, although she is referenced no less than ten times, the mother of Jesus is also never named in the Gospel and she was most *certainly* a historical figure, who *is* named in the Synoptic tradition. I agree with Tabor, however, that the Beloved Disciple refers to a real person, not some symbolic figure. Yet another opinion theorizes that "the Beloved Disciple was a minor figure during the ministry of Jesus, too unimportant to be remembered in the more official tradition of the Synoptics (Brown). But since this figure became important in Johannine community history (perhaps the founder of the community), he became the ideal in its Gospel picture, capable of being contrasted with Peter as closer to Jesus in love."⁷⁰⁰

Taking cue from Tatian and al-Biqā'i, if we harmonize the Last Supper accounts of Mark and John, we come to realize that the Beloved Disciple was indeed one of the twelve Disciples. Mark says: "And when it was evening, he came with the twelve" (Καὶ ὁψίας γενομένης ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα, 14:17), while the "apocryphal" Gospel of the Hebrews states explicitly that James the Just was present. In John, this Disciple is resting on the chest of Christ during Supper, and given the fact that the evangelist only names *nine* disciples, we can narrow down the candidates to three: Matthew, Simon the Zealot, and James the Less, later called "the Just," by Christ himself. Perhaps, as some scholars suggest, the reason why James the Less, and Matthew for that matter, are summarily written out of John is that the Johannine author wants to discredit the early Jewish-Christian movement whose views of Christ, or "low Christology," may have originated

⁷⁰⁰ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 369.

with these two men. I would contend, however, that it is quite the opposite. The nearest and dearest members of Jesus' Holy House (*hagios oikos*), specifically Mary (his mother) and James (the Beloved Disciple and his brother) are never named in the Gospel in order to draw the reader/listener's attention toward them as a way of praising them. While this may seem strange for us to grasp, we should remember that John the Baptist, in his many statements about Christ in the Gospel of John, never reveals the actual *name* of his successor. He wants his disciples to identify him by his actions and character, just as the evangelist wants us to identify the Beloved Disciple, the successor of Christ and preserver of the messianic secrets, by closely meditating upon his writings in order to *understand* why he (James) was the leader of the Jerusalem *ecclesia* after 33 CE.

According to Tabor, the "other disciple" (ἄλλος μαθητής) who accompanied Peter into the courtyard of the High Priest, and "was known by the High Priest" (ἐκεῖνος ἦν γνωστὸς τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ [John 18:15]), was most likely the Beloved Disciple,⁷⁰¹ as he is often juxtaposed with Peter following Jesus in some sense, and remains unnamed. Tabor remarks then that this disciple has some "priestly connections."⁷⁰² With respect to James the Just, Eusebius quotes Hegesippus (d. 180 CE), who said:

"James, the Lord's brother, succeeds to the government of the Church, in conjunction with the apostles. He has been universally called *the Just*, from the days of the Lord down to the present time. For many bore the name of James; but this one was holy from his mother's womb. He drank no wine or *other* intoxicating liquor, nor did he eat flesh; no razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, nor make use of the bath. He alone was permitted to enter the holy place: for he did not wear any woollen garment, but fine *linen only*. He alone, *I* say, was wont to go into the temple: and he used to be found kneeling on his knees, begging forgiveness for the people-so that the skin of his knees became horny like that of a camel's, by reason of his constantly bending the knee in adoration to God, and begging forgiveness for the people. Therefore, in

⁷⁰¹ Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty*; also see: <https://jamestabor.com/who-was-the-mysterious-disciple-whom-jesus-loved/>

⁷⁰² *ibid.*

consequence of his pre-eminent justice, he was called *the Just*, and *Oblis*, which signifies in Greek *Defence of the People*, and *Justice*, in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him.”⁷⁰³

The quintessential *Hagioichalist* Johannine passage which I would suggest is tantamount to the Prophet Muhammad’s appointment of Ali as his spiritual successor at *Ghadir al-Khumm*, is the iconic scene at the Crucifixion described in John 19:23-27.

(23) When they crucified 'Isa the soldiers they took his clothes and made (them) into four parts - a part for each soldier - and the robe (underneath); but the robe was seamless, (and) woven from top to bottom throughout the whole (of it). (24) Therefore they said to one another, “Let’s not split it up but let’s cast lots for it (to see) whose it will be,” so that the scriptures might be fulfilled [which says], ‘They divided my garments among themselves, and cast lots for my clothing.’ Therefore, the soldiers did these things. (25) And near the cross of 'Isa stood his mother, and the sister of his mother, Maryam the (wife) of Clopas, and Maryam the Magdalene. (26) Therefore when 'Isa saw (his) mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near (him), he said to (his) mother, “(Dear) woman, Look (at) your son!” (27) Then he said to the disciple, “Look (at) your mother!” So from that time, the disciple took her into his own home.

The above passage reveals that a *quaternion* of Roman soldiers were assigned to the Crucifixion of Jesus and while they divided his outer garments between themselves, an indication (إشارة) that there will be different interpretations of the message of Jesus among various Christian, or “Christic” (عيساوي), communities, [فَاخْتَلَفَ الْأَحْزَابُ مِنْ بَيْنِهِمْ (Q 19:37.1)], they left the “seamless robe” (χιτὼν ἄραφος) underneath undivided. The Greek verb for “divide,” in v. 24 (σχίσωμεν) is related to the word *schisma* (σχίσω), used in John 7:43 to indicate a difference of opinion (about Jesus’ identity), and is used by the evangelist in v. 24 to indicate that the *inner* (باطني) message of the Gospel has been and continues to be preserved by the Johannine community, or might we say the *Jamsonian* community, after inheriting it from the Holy House of Jesus Christ, namely from James,

⁷⁰³ Translated by Peter Kirby. “Historical Jesus Theories.” *Early Christian Writings*, 2016; Hegesippus, *Hypomnemata*, Book V from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.23, 3.20, 3.32, 4.22.

Mary the Virgin, and others. We notice that there were four members of Jesus' *family* who stood at the foot of the cross; these are the ones who have the greatest insights as to the true teachings of the Messiah. They are "his mother" (ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ) Mary, his maternal aunt "the sister of his mother, Mary the wife of Clopas" (ἡ ἀδελφὴ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ), his *wife* Mary of Magdalene (Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή), and James "the disciple whom he loved (*agapistically*)" (τὸν μαθητὴν ὃν ἠγάπα) - three Marys and a James. And it was James who "took up the *mantle*" (*khirqah* [خرقة]) of Christ, represented by his mystical reception of the seamless robe, thus bestowing upon James esoteric knowledge (*ta'wil*), spiritual blessing (*barakah*), and making him the first link in the initiatic chain (*silsilah*) of the Gospel's teaching transmission. With respect to Mary the wife of Clopas, Mark refers to her as "Mary, the (mother) of James" (Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Ἰακώβου); this is James the Less (ὁ μικρὸς), *not* the Greater (not the brother of John, the son of Zebedee), but the one whom I contend became the leader of the Jerusalem episcopate after the ascension of Jesus. The husband of this Mary is also called "Alpaeus" (Ἀλφαῖος) in addition to Clopas, according to Thayer. Therefore, James the Less ("the Just") is actually the first cousin of Christ, the son of his mother's sister, who is affectionately called his "brother," just as the Prophet Muhammad referred to his first-cousin and inheritor of Muhammadan secrets 'Ali as his "brother" (أخي). In fact, Jesus has four "brothers" (first-cousins) with whom he was raised in the Galilee according to Mark 6:3, "James, Joses,⁷⁰⁴ Judah, and Simon," - all sons of his mother's sister, Mary (wife) of Clopas, and all *unnamed* in the Gospel of John. "This silence seems more than incidental or accidental."⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰⁴ Tabor suggests in *The Jesus Dynasty* that Joses (Joseph) may be Matthew.

⁷⁰⁵ See: <https://jamestabor.com/who-was-the-mysterious-disciple-whom-jesus-loved/>.

With this in mind, we can now better understand Jesus' statements from the cross to his mother and brother, "Dear woman, Behold, your son" (Γύναι ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου) and "Behold, your mother," (ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου) respectively. Since Mary did not have any other children, Jesus is entrusting the care of his mother to the closest person resembling her next son, the eldest son of her sister - "So from that time, the disciple took her into his own home (lit. "his own things") (ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας ἔλαβεν ὁ μαθητὴς αὐτὴν εἰς τὰ ἴδια). The inspired evangelist frames Jesus' life with this expression (εἰς τὰ ἴδια [John 1:11; 19:27]), with its former occurrence referring to Christ and its latter in reference to James, thus intimating to the reader of the Gospel that James is the true extension of Christ and the reason why "the light continues to shine in the darkness" (John 1:5.5), for Christ is still "in the world" (John 9:5.5) through his successor, thus the plural: "It is necessary for *us* to do the works of the One who sent me while it is day" (John 9:4.1). This Jamsonian home represents the genesis of the Johannine teachings about Jesus eventually recorded in the Gospel of John. James is the keeper of the "mother church" represented by Mary. Thus when the believers in Christ witnessed his ascension, according to Acts 1, the mother of Jesus is described as being "with his brothers" (Μαριὰ τῇ μητρὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ σὺν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ [Acts 1:14.9]). This "passing of the mantle" is even more explicit in the Gospel of Thomas quoted earlier, where Jesus says in Λογιον 12, "Wherever you are, you are to go to James the Righteous (*Ya'kov al-Saddiq*) for whose sake heaven and earth came into being."⁷⁰⁶ That is to say, James is the Axis (قطب), the one who knows God as Jesus did, "the unique man of Christ" (الفرد المسيحي) in the language of the Sufis, and the one who actualizes God's Oneness (توحيد) upon the

⁷⁰⁶ Also see *The Gospel of the Hebrews* in which James is magnified.

earth. He is the heir of Christ with respect to authorial and “esoteric succession” (الخلافة الباطنية).⁷⁰⁷ Thus the Christic Holy House, like the Muhammadan Holy House, is the true preserver of the “lights” (أنوار) and “secrets” (أسرار) of the Gospel. Ibn ‘Ajibah defines these terms respectively as “the outward and dense aspects of God’s epiphanies (عبارة عن) ” and “their inward and subtle aspects (عبارة عن ما ظهر فيها من المعاني) ” (ما ظهر من كثائف التجليات اللطيفة).⁷⁰⁸

Coloe points out that there are three major persons on or near the cross: Christ, Mary (the mother of Christ), and the Beloved Disciple. While the relationship between Christ and Mary is obviously mother and son, Jesus changes the relationship between Mary and the Beloved Disciple to one of mother and son as well.⁷⁰⁹ Therefore, the Beloved Disciple and Jesus must (now) be brothers, although I would contend that the inspired evangelist is actually giving an implicit indication (إشارة) that the Beloved Disciple was James, the actual “brother (cousin) of the lord,” as Hegesippus, Jerome, and Eusebius call him. According to Coloe, Jesus as Temple,⁷¹⁰ is now creating “his Father’s new House,”⁷¹¹ that is to say, his Father’s new *Household* - the Family of God (أهل الله). The good news (*Gospel*) of “birth” into God’s Family, birth “from above,” is now indicated by the flowing of blood and water from the side of Christ, as this is exactly what flows when a child is literally born - born “from water.” Coloe says that this open invitation of God’s grace (χάρις) to become “children of God” was referred to as *theosis*

⁷⁰⁷ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 71-72. Cf. pages 72-75 where Ibn ‘Ajibah mentions Abu’l Hasan al-Shadhili’s fifteen distinctive signs of the Pole (القطب).

⁷⁰⁸ *ibid*, 63.

⁷⁰⁹ See: Mary L. Coloe PBVM and Sandra Schneiders IHM, *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 2007).

⁷¹⁰ Mary Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 65-84.

⁷¹¹ Coloe, *Dwelling in the Household of God*, 157-178.

by the Patristic theologians. Christ himself invites all to be members of God's Family and Household: "In the House (οἶκος) of my Father, there are many rooms..." (John 14.2.1).

Mary the Magdalene, the Wife of Jesus Christ

We read in the Qur'an: "Indeed we sent Messengers before you (O Muhammad) and appointed for them wives and descendants" (وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَذُرِّيَّةً [Q 13:38.1]). According to the Sufis, (heterosexual) marriage, specifically the act of lovemaking (جماع), is an analogy for *unio mystica* (جمع) with God and thus conducive towards a person's spirituality. Monks (رهبانية) was not a practice given to the earliest followers of Jesus Christ, and is thus deemed a reprehensible innovation (بدعة غير حسنة) by the Qur'an (وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ [Q 57:27.5]). In fact, there are three passages in the New Testament that clearly suggest that no less than the first "Pope" Peter had at least one wife (1 Cor. 9:5 where Paul says that Cephas has a "wife" [γυναικα]; Matt. 8:14-15 & Luke 4:38-39 where Jesus visits the "mother-in-law" [πενθερά] of Peter). With this said, it seems extremely unlikely that a Rabbi living in ancient Galilee would have remained a bachelor into his thirties, and as Phipps suggests, the (apparent) lack of a clear reference to Jesus' marriage or wife in the New Testament actually indicates that the author(s) considered Jesus' marital status as axiomatic.⁷¹² But could it be that Jesus *himself* was the "bridegroom" (νυμφίος), as the Baptist calls him (John 3:29), at the wedding in Cana in John 2? I contend that there are strong reasons for believing that he was. First of all, his mother, brothers, and Disciples were all in attendance, and when he changes the water into wine, the "master of feast" called for the "bridegroom" (νυμφίος)

⁷¹² William E. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married? The Distortion of Sexuality in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 196.

and said to him, “Every man first brings the good wine and when people get drunk, then (brings) the worse; but you have kept the good wine until now” (John 2:10)! It seems as though Jesus and the bridegroom are one and the same. But who is the bride? We do not actually encounter her name until chapter eleven perhaps because she lived in Bethany with her siblings and not with Jesus in Galilee, or perhaps the evangelist intends his silence about her identity to be an indication of her status as a holy member of the messianic House. However, unlike Jesus’ mother and brothers (including the Beloved Disciple), the name of Jesus’ wife, Mary of Magdala, is eventually and enigmatically disclosed by the evangelist. Perhaps the evangelist intends on establishing a “second tier” of teaching authority within the Holy House of Christ; something akin to the difference between the *’Itra* (عطرة) and the “greater House” (اهل البيت) of the Prophet Muhammad.⁷¹³

In John 11:3 we are told that the sisters of Lazarus sent (messengers) to him (Jesus) saying, “O Master! Behold, *the one whom you love* (ὃν φιλεῖς [*philiopistically*]) is sick.” Why does Jesus have this friendship-love for Lazarus? This is the first time we hear his name. The evangelist continues to tell us, “And Jesus *loved* (ἠγάπα [*agapistically*]) Martha, her sister (Mary of Magdala), and Lazarus” (11:5). What can possibly explain why Jesus has such *special-love* for these three people? The answer is that Mary is his wife and Martha and Lazarus are his sister and brother-in-law respectively. They are members of the Holy Messianic House and therefore pivotal to the

⁷¹³ The phrase *Ahl al-Bayt* (*Bayt*) is used three times in the Qur’an, with the immediate references being to wives or mothers of prophets (Q 11:73 [Sarah]); (Q 28:12 [the mother of Moses, with *bayt* as anarthrous]); 33:33 [the wives of the Prophet]). However, in a *hadith* of al-Tabarani narrated by Umm Salamah, the Prophet seemingly specified only five members of the House as constituting *Ahl al-Bayt*: ‘Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, Husayn, and himself - the *Ahl al-Kisa*, by his statement: “These are the People of my House” (هؤلاء (أهل بيتي) while purposely excluding his wife Umm Salamah. Muslim scholars, such as Shaykh Muhammad al-Ninowy, reconcile Q 33:33 with this *hadith* by explaining that while the Prophet certainly affirmed that his wives were part of the House, the “greater House,” the five aforementioned members make up the *’Itra*, the close members who have special rank with God.

transmission of the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The specialness of Mary of Magdala is further subtly indicated by the evangelist telling us that while Martha went out to meet Jesus, Mary “was sitting in the *house*” (δὲ ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ἐκαθέζετο [11:20]), and when she (Martha) called Mary, she said to her sister “secretly” (λάθρᾳ), “The teacher is present and calls for you.” This is the only occurrence of the word λάθρᾳ in the Gospel of John. Obviously, Jesus wants a moment alone with his wife away from the crowds, for he “was still in the place where Martha met him” (11:30). If Mary of Magdala was not his wife, we are left with trying to answer the uncomfortable question of why a respected Rabbi and messianic claimant is sending secret messages to a “strange” woman and intends to meet her in private? Although such a meeting would not have been forbidden by law *per se*, as long as the prohibitions of *negiah* established by Leviticus 18:6, 19 were upheld, it is nonetheless an unusual event. For instance, although the Disciples knew full well that no *physical* contact (*negiah*) had taken place between Jesus and the Samaritan woman described in John 4, they were nevertheless “shocked” (ἐθαύμασαν) that he was speaking with a “woman” (γυναικὸς [4:27]); note that their shock was not because she was a *Samaritan* woman, but only a *woman*, and certainly not because of what Luther may have suggested.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹⁴ Arnold Lunn writes that Weimar quoted a passage from Martin Luther’s Table Talk (Weimar edition, Vol 2, page 107). The Weimar quote is: “Christ committed adultery first of all with the women at the well about whom St. John tells us. Was not everybody about Him saying: ‘Whatever has He been doing with her?’ Secondly, with Mary Magdalen, and thirdly with the women taken in adultery whom He dismissed so lightly. Thus even, Christ who was so righteous, must have been guilty of fornication before He died.” The original: “*Christus adulter. Christus ist am ersten ein ebrecher worden Joh. 4, bei dem brunn cum muliere, quia illi dicebant: Nemo significat, quid facit cumea? Item cum Magdalena, item cum adulteris Joh. 8, die er so leicht dauon lies. Also mus der from Christus auch am ersten ein ebrecher werden ehe er starb.*” Trishreden, Weimer Edition, Vol. 2, Pg. 107. Quoted from: M.M. Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 269.

However, we are told that Mary fell at his “feet” (πόδας) and addressed Jesus as “Κύριε” (11:32), an expression that we will look at momentarily. A chapter later, the evangelist tells us that Mary took a pound of pure and expensive myrrh of nard and anointed the “feet” (πόδας) of Jesus then wiped his “feet” (πόδας) with her hair (12:3), so that the “house” (οικία) was filled with fragrance. Once again Mary is associated with Jesus’ *feet* and the word *house*, and *both* of these words suggest that she is married to Jesus. According to Hubbard,⁷¹⁵ Nielsen,⁷¹⁶ Fentress-Williams,⁷¹⁷ Goldingay,⁷¹⁸ and other scholars of the Hebrew Bible, the word “feet” (רגל) could be a euphemism for a man’s sexual organs.⁷¹⁹ The most famous passages where this possible meaning emerges are Ruth 3:1-4 and 2 Sam. 11:8-11. In the former, Naomi tells Ruth to “uncover his (Boaz’s) feet” (וַתִּגְלֵת מִרְגְּלָיו) and “lie down” next to him; in the latter, David commands Uriah to go home and “wash your feet” (וַיִּרְחֹץ רַגְלָיו). Uriah refuses and explains to David that “the Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents,” so how can he in good

⁷¹⁵ Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 203.

⁷¹⁶ Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 69.

⁷¹⁷ Judy Fentress-Williams, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Ruth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 89.

⁷¹⁸ John Goldingay, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 180.

⁷¹⁹ Cf. Marvin H. Pope in Anchor Bible Dictionary, I, 721: “Feet” (raglayim) is also used for genitals of either sex, as in the aforementioned circumlocution “feet water” for urine. In Isa 7:20, “hair of feet” refers to pubic hair. Deut 28:57 speaks of the (formerly) pampered woman in famine eating the afterbirth that comes out from between her “feet.” Jerusalem, personified as a wanton nymphomaniac (Ezek 16:25), is charged with spreading her “feet” to every passerby. In Isa 6:2 the six wings of the seraphim come in three pairs, one to cover the face (for reverence), one to cover the “feet” (for modesty), and the third pair for flying. Uriah the Hittite, called home on furlough by King David and urged to go home and “wash his feet,” protested that while his comrades were still in battle he would not go home to eat and drink and “lie with his wife” (2 Sam 11:8). One who is quick with his “feet” sins (Prov 19:2). The term “soul” (nepeš) in this same verse also has sexual meaning, as it has in at least one clear instance in Ugaritic when the impotent hero Danel sought divine help and had his “soul” (npš) restored and then went home and sired a son. In Sufi philosophy “soul” (nafs) is used of carnal concupiscence which, like a black watchdog, is ever alert to assail a man and make him sin. The proverb (19:2) thus means: “Without knowledge ‘soul’ (libido) is not good. One fast with his ‘feet’ sins.” King Asa, at the end of his long reign, got sick in his “feet” (1 Chr 16:12); whether the ailment was in the pedal extremities or in the urogenital tract is unclear. When the Lord accosted Moses and sought to kill him (Exod 4:25), Zipporah circumcised her son and touched Moses’ “feet” with the foreskin. Just where the “blood(y) husband” was dabbed with the son’s prepuce we can only surmise, but the best guess seems the area where foreskins are located.

conscience go home and “sleep with my wife” (וְלִשְׁכַּב עִם-אִשְׁתִּי). Even with this said, I do not believe, however, that the evangelist means to tell us anything other than the fact there was *some* level of physical intimacy between Jesus and Mary. The “feet analogy” denotes a strong eros (عشق) that existed between the two spouses, but also between Jesus and his Disciples, as the former “washed the feet” of the latter towards the end of the Gospel. While some may see homoerotic undertones here, I contend rather that “the washing of feet” for the Johannine author during the Last Supper is the “locus of love”⁷²⁰ and symbolizes intimate but *non-sexual* selfless love between men, or rather between the Master (مرشد) and his Disciples (مريدون). Christ was ‘*ashiq* (عاشق) of his Disciples and his Disciples were ‘*ashiqun* of him. The act represents the realities of “spiritual love-making” or *tajawwuh* (توجه) according to the Sufis in which the Master compassionately focuses his attention upon the hearts of his disciples in order to treat their maladies.

Jesus as “Lord”

In Greek as well as Hebrew, the word for “wife” and “woman” are one and the same, namely, γυνή and נִשְׂאָה respectively. In John 20:13, the angels say to Mary Γύναι τί κλαίεις, which I have translated as “(Dear) wife, why do you mourn?” Mary responds, “They took away my husband!” (ἔραντὸν κύριόν μου). But can *kurios* (κύριος) be translated in this way? The evangelist seems to have Genesis 18 in mind where “angels” announce to Sarah the “good news” of the birth of Isaac, who will be the fulfillment of God’s promise and progenitor of the Israelite nation. Sarah incredulously answers, “After I have become old, will I have this pleasure - and *my husband* (Greek LXX: κύριός μου,

⁷²⁰ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 728.

Heb. רַבִּי is old” (Gen. 18:12)?⁷²¹ Now in John, the angels are about to announce to Mary of Magdala, the wife of another prophet, the “good news” of Jesus’ resurrection, and she utters the exact phrase that Sarah did, κύριός μου (רַבִּי), about *her* husband. Just as the birth of Isaac marked a seminal moment in the history of God’s people, the resurrection of the Jewish Messiah likewise fulfills God’s promise to His people and begins a critical time in the salvific history of the Israelites that will have global repercussions. Thus in John 11:32 when Mary falls at Jesus’ “feet” and calls him Κύριε, I believe that she probably embraced him (displayed some sort of physical intimacy) and meant “my husband.” *Kurios* meaning “the husband in contrast to the wife”⁷²² is even more apparent in 1 Peter 3:6.⁷²³ Therefore the word *kurios* (κύριος) or “*rabb*” (רב in Arabic) (רַבִּי in Hebrew) is used in four ways in the Gospel of John:

1. As **“Lord (God)”**: The source of all things; the Immanent Deity: Ὡσαννά εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ (12:13.9).
2. As **“Master” or “Teacher:”** ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν οὐκ ἔστιν δοῦλος μείζων τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ (13:16); ἀπεκρίθη οὖν αὐτῷ Σίμων Πέτρος Κύριε πρὸς τίνα ἀπελευσόμεθα ῥήματα ζωῆς αἰωνίου ἔχεις (6:68). This is the same usage of the term in 1 Kings 18:7 where Obadiah asks Elijah, “Is that you *my lord* (רַבִּי, LXX: κύριέ μου)?” The translators of the famous KJV rendered all occurrences of the Greek *kurios* as “Lord” (with a capital “I”) when any Disciple is speaking to Christ, implying that the Disciples believed Jesus to

⁷²¹ The BDAG gives a definition of *kurios*: “as a designation of any pers. of high position: the husband in contrast to the wife” then cites Gen 18:12 specifically, 459.

⁷²² *ibid*, 459.

⁷²³ This verse is cited as an example of *kurios* as meaning husband by the BDAG: “As Sarah obeyed Abraham calling him ‘lord’” (ὡς Σάρρα ὑπήκουσεν τῷ Ἀβραάμ κύριον αὐτὸν καλοῦσα [1 Peter 3:6.1]).

be God. However, the evangelist has at times supplied for us the actual Hebrew (Aramaic) word used by the Disciples when they addressed Jesus directly: “Rabbi,” which is to say when translated: “Teacher” - “Where are you staying?” (ῥαββί ὃ λέγεται μεθερμηνευόμενον διδάσκαλε ποῦ μένεις [1:38.9]); Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel!” (ἀπεκρίθη Ναθαναήλ καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ Ῥαββί σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ σὺ εἶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ [1:49]); “She said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbi!” (which means teacher) (ἐκείνη λέγει αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστί ραββουνι ὃ λέγεται διδάσκαλε [20:16.9]).

3. As “**Sir:**” λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ γυνή **Κύριε** οὔτε ἄντλημα ἔχεις καὶ τὸ φρέαρ ἐστὶν βαθύ πόθεν οὖν ἔχεις τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ζῶν (4:11). The woman at the well is simply being courteous to a stranger; she does not (yet) know that Jesus is a teacher/scholar/prophet/Christ. And: οὗτοι οὖν προσῆλθον Φιλίππῳ τῷ ἀπὸ Βηθσαϊδὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἡρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες **Κύριε** θέλομεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἰδεῖν (12:21), where *Philip* is called *kurios*. Finally: **Κύριε** εἰ σὺ ἐβάστασας αὐτόν εἰπέ μοι ποῦ αὐτόν ἔθηκες καὶ γὰρ αὐτόν ἄρῳ (20:15.9). Mary certainly isn’t calling the “gardener” teacher nor God! Dunn says, especially in light of 1 Cor. 1:3, that “the kyrios title is not so much a way of identifying Jesus with God, as a way of distinguishing Jesus *from* God”⁷²⁴ (emphasis mine).

4. As “**husband:**” ἡ οὖν Μαρία, ὡς ἦλθεν ὅπου ἦν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἰδοῦσα αὐτόν ἔπεσεν εἰς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ λέγουσα αὐτῷ **Κύριε** εἰ ἦς ὧδε οὐκ ἂν ἀπέθανεν μου ὁ ἀδελφός (11:32). Interestingly, Martha refers to Jesus by the same title (κύριε) just five verses

⁷²⁴ James D.G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus, The New Testament Evidence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 110. Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:3: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“Grace to you [all] and peace from God our Father, and [from] the Master [κυρίου] Jesus Christ.”)

earlier (11:27) but does not “fall at his feet.” Thus she intends to say “Master” or “Teacher.” And: καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῇ ἐκεῖνοι Γύναι τί κλαίεις λέγει αὐτοῖς ὅτι Ἦραν τὸν **κύριόν** μου καὶ οὐκ οἶδα ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν (20:13).

In John 20:16, the grieving widow recognizes her husband’s voice by his uniquely endearing way of pronouncing her name in Hebrew “*Maryam!*,” causing her to exclaim (in Hebrew) “Rabbi!” (ῥαββουνί) and immediately leap and grab hold of him to which Jesus exclaims “Stop clinging to me!” The evangelist wants to convey that the reunion is very personal and intimate. The Greek expression, μή μου ἄπτου, contains the verb ἄπτομαι in the present middle imperative which suggests that Mary was *already* clinging to Jesus when he issued the prohibition. However, Jesus does not prohibit Mary from continuing to touch him due to rules of *negiah* since Mary of Magdala is the *only woman who touches Jesus* earlier in the Gospel, and Jesus did not forbid her then. If Jesus was *not* married to Mary, then why didn’t the Pharisees accuse him of violating *negiah* in their many verbal joustings with Jesus? In fact, Jesus boldly challenges them: “Who among you can convict me of (committing) a sin” (John 8:46.1)? The reason for the prohibition *now* in John 20 is enigmatic. Perhaps according to Jewish law, the death of the husband (even if he is brought back to life) revokes the marriage. Thus it is *now* unlawful for Mary to touch Jesus; “For not yet have I ascended to the Father,” meaning that it is him “in the flesh” and not some vision, but when he ascends and Mary sees him in dreams and visions, then they can be more intimate. (?) The inspired evangelist may also be making a key theo-christological point here as well as a veiled prophecy. Rabia al-’Adawiyya said, “Seek the Gardener, not the garden.” The “Gardener” (γεωργός) is the Father according to John 15:1, the one who prunes the “true vine” (Jesus) and cuts away

the branches that bear no fruit. Mary *mistakes* Jesus for the Gardener (although the Greek for “gardener” here is κηπουρός) and “clings” to him and is immediately reprimanded by Christ, because “clinging” (*devekut*) to God (the Father) alone is proper - “in spirit and in truth.” The evangelist thus cautions his readers that the event of the Resurrection may lead many followers of Christ to deify him out of their love and longing for him. Such individuals and groups run the risk of being “cut off” by the Father thrown “into the fire” (εἰς τὸ πῦρ [John 15:6.5]).

'Isa Does Not Teach from Himself, but Speaks with Allah's Authority

(10) But after his kinsmen had gone up to the festival, then he also went up, not openly but in secret. (11) The Jewish authorities were seeking him at the festival and asking, “Where is he?” (12) And there was much grumbling about him among the crowds; some were saying, “He is a good man!” but others were saying, “No, he is deceiving the people!”⁷²⁵ (13) However no one was speaking openly about him due to the fear of the Jewish authorities.

(14) When the festival was half over, 'Isa went up into the Temple and began to teach. (15) The Jewish authorities were amazed saying, “How does this (man) know so much since he has never been taught?” (16) Therefore 'Isa answered and said to them, “My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me. (17) If anyone wants to do His will, he will know concerning the teaching, whether it is from Allah, or if I am speaking on my own.”⁷²⁶ (18) The one who speaks on his own seeks his own glory, but if he seeks the glory of the One who sent him, (then) he is true and there is no iniquity in him. (19) Didn't Musa give you the Torah? But none of you (truly) keep the Torah. Why *me* do you seek to kill?!” (20) The crowd answered, “You have a demon! Who seeks to kill you?” (21) 'Isa answered and said to them, “I did one thing (on the Sabbath) and you are all shocked. (22) This is why Musa gave you the (*mitzvah* of) circumcision - although it originated not with Musa but with the Patriarchs - even on the Sabbath you circumcise a man! (23) If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Musa is not violated, (then why) are you angry with me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? (24) *Do not judge according to outward appearances, but judge rightly and justly!*”⁷²⁷

⁷²⁵ Christ's truthful message is polarizing and causes “division” (σχίσμα) quite often in John (7:43; 9:16; 10:19). Some classical commentators take *al-Bayyinah* in Q 98:4 to be a reference to Jesus Christ: “Those who were given the Bible (*al-Kitab*) did not become divided until the Clear Sign (Christ) came to them.”

⁷²⁶ If Jesus *is* Allah, then drawing a distinction between “speaking from himself” and (speaking) “from Allah” becomes superfluous. Jesus is rather intimating that his speech is guided by Allah since he holds the prophetic office, not that he is literally Allah.

⁷²⁷ B-D-F calls this the Accusative of Content or Cognate Accusative. “Where the accusative is a cognate of the verb either in etymology or meaning, it serves a purpose only when a qualifying word or phrase in the form of an attributive (adjective or genitive) is introduced... A comparable idiom is found in both

The Apology of Christ I: He is a True Prophet

Jesus goes again into Jerusalem for the festival of the Tabernacles, and yet again finds himself on the defensive against aggressive Jewish elements. In this *apologia*, Christ seems to be responding to his detractors' notion that he is a Sabbath-breaking false prophet who "deceives the people." The Jewish authorities may have had the criteria of a true prophet (נביא אמת) described in Deuteronomy 13:1-3 in mind (given below), and may have also concluded that the reason why Jesus is so learned, despite having no apparent transmissional chain of authority (سند), is simply because he is possessed by a demon (مجنون).

כִּי־יָקוּם בְּקִרְבְּךָ נָבִיא אוֹ חֹלֵם וְנָתַן אֵלָיֶךָ אוֹת אוֹ מוֹפֵת
"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, who gives you a sign or wonder,"

וּבֹא הָאוֹת וְהַמּוֹפֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר אֵלָיֶךָ לֹא־מֵרַגְלֶךָ אֲחֵרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתֶּם וְנִשְׁבַּחְתֶּם
"And the sign and wonder occurs which he spoke to you (while also) saying, 'Let us go after other gods which you have not known, and let us worship them,'"

לֹא תִשְׁמַע אֶל־דִּבְרֵי הַנָּבִיא הַהוּא אוֹ אֶל־חֹלֵם הַחֹלֵם הַהוּא כִּי מִנְסָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶתְכֶם לְדַעַת הִיִּשְׁכֶּם אֱלֹהִים
אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּכָל־לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם
"You shall not obey the words of that prophet, nor obey that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you in order that (He) might know whether you love the Lord your God with all of your heart and all of your soul."

Jesus begins by stating that his teachings (or doctrine, διδασχῆ) as well as his knowledge and authority to teach the spiritual path are not simply the machinations of his own self, nor are they inherited from some earthly Rabbi, but they come directly from his teacher - God, the Father. However only one who is totally submitted to God's *thelema* (θέλημα) and strives to fulfill His Preferential Will will understand that when Christ

Hebrew and Aramaic" (B-D-F, p. 84-85, sect. 153). I would also add Arabic, called the Homonymous or Synonymous Infinitive Absolute explicating upon the Qualitative Aspect of the Verb (المفعول المعلق اللفظي أو (المعنوي لبيان نوع فعله).

speaks, he is not speaking, as he says, “from myself” (ἀπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ); it is God who speaks through him because he is a true prophet, or spokesman for the Divine. Buehler says: “One who had certainty (*yaqin*) through direct intuitive knowledge of God overshadowed ordinary Ulama who had to rely on long chains of transmitters, some of whom might not have been reliable.”⁷²⁸ Thus the Pharisees essentially asked Jesus who his Rabbi was with their question recorded by Mark (11:28.9): τίς σοι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταῦτα ποιεῖς (“Who gave you authority to do these things?”). But Jesus relies not on any man, or Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d. 261/875) once proclaimed: “You take your knowledge from the dead who took it from the dead while we take our knowledge from the Living who never dies!”⁷²⁹ Jesus then refutes any notion that he is calling to “other gods” (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים) or that he himself is claiming ontological equality with God by characterizing his *didache* as one that is not self-aggrandizing but rather glorifying of God (who will glorify the Son). Therefore, Jesus’ miracles coupled with the fact that he loves, obeys, and glorifies the Father proves that he is “true” (ἀληθής, אמת), and that there is “no iniquity in him.” At this point, Jesus takes a short leave from his *apologia* and goes on the *offensive*, and essentially says, “Speaking of the Torah, why don’t *you* now apply its teachings correctly and accept my prophesy and messiahship? But no, you want to kill me!” The “crowd” (ὄχλος) now has no rejoinder but to insist upon his insanity - a common response to true prophesy according to the Qur’an: “And they say, ‘O you upon whom the Revelation descends, you are indeed insane (lit. *jinn* possessed)’” (وَقَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِي نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الذِّكْرُ إِنَّكَ) [Q 15:6]). Returning to his defense with respect to his apparent “breaking” of the

⁷²⁸ Buehler, “Sufism: A Holistic Approach to Islam” in *Sufi Illuminations: A Journal Devoted to the Study of Islam and Sufism*, Vol. 4 No. 1 Spring 2008, chief ed. Redzic, 13.

⁷²⁹ Quoted from: Kamil Mustafa Al-Shaibi, *Sufism and Shi’ism* (Surrey: LAAM Ltd. 1991), 65.

Sabbath, Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the Jewish authorities by pointing out that the scribes and Pharisees do not hesitate to circumcise boys on the Sabbath because the former do not consider it “creative work” but rather a fulfillment of a great Mosaic *mitzvah*, yet when Jesus heals a man in fulfillment of the iconic Leviticus 19:18 (“And you shall love your neighbor as yourself” [וְאַהֲבָהָהּ לְרֵעֵךְ כָּמוֹךָ]), he is suddenly labeled a Sabbath-breaker! Jesus concludes his defense by stating, “Do not judge according to outward appearances, but judge the just and righteous judgment” (μὴ κρίνετε κατ’ ὄψιν ἀλλὰ τὴν δικαίαν κρίσιν κρίνατε [7:24])! With this statement, in my view, Jesus acknowledges not only that his teaching was being misconstrued by his contemporary Jewish elements, caught up in superficial exotericism, but will also be misunderstood by future Christian literalists. On the surface (ὄψις, lit. “face”) Jesus appears to be an unlettered Nazarene, “the son of Yusuf” (ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ, 6:42), who breaks the Sabbath, endorses cannibalism, and claims to be God! Whereas in reality (حقیقة), he is a wise prophet, born of a virgin, who receives Revelation from God, the true Messiah and spiritual Master, and mystically united with God.

'Isa Defends His Messianic Claim

(25) Then some of the people of Jerusalem said, “This is the one that they seek to kill? (26) Look! He speaks in public (like this) and they say nothing to him. Is it possible that the (Jewish) leaders actually know that this is al-Masih? (27) But we know (quite well) where this (man) is from; when al-Masih comes, no one will know where he is from.” (28) Therefore, while 'Isa was teaching in the Temple, he cried out saying, “(Yes), *me*⁷³⁰ you do know and where I am from (very

⁷³⁰ καὶ μὲ οἶδατε καὶ οἶδατε πόθεν εἰμί, with καὶ μὲ (conjunctive *kai* and pronominal *ego*) placed first in the accusative as the fronted object of *oída*.

well,)⁷³¹ but I have not come on my own;⁷³² the One who sent me is true, whom you do not know (well). (29) I know Him because I am from Him - He sent me.” (30) Therefore (the leaders) sought to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him because his time had not yet come. (31) But many people from the crowd believed in him and said, “Whenever al-Masih comes, will he do more miracles than this (man) has done?”

‘Isa Causes Division: Is He the Messiah or the Prophet?

(32) When the Pharisees heard the crowd whispering these things about him ('Isa), the chief priests and Pharisees sent the Temple guards to arrest him. (33) 'Isa said, “Yet a little time I am with you, then I will go to the One who sent me. (34) You will seek me but will not find me, and where I am you are not able to come.” (35) Therefore the Jewish authorities said to themselves, “Where is he about to go where we will not find him? He is not going into the Greek lands of Jewish Diaspora to teach the Hellenized Jews, is he? (36) What does his statement mean when he said, ‘You will seek me but will not find me, and where I am you are not able to come.’”

(37) On the last and greatest day of the festival, 'Isa stood up and cried out saying, “If someone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. (38) The one who believes in me, as the Scripture said, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water. (39) And this he said about the Spirit which those who believed in him were about to receive, for the (Spirit) was not yet there because 'Isa had not yet been glorified.

(40) From the crowd (some) who were listening to these statements were saying, “This is truly the Prophet.” (41) Others were saying, “This is al-Masih.” (Yet others) were saying (in response to the latter), “But al-Masih doesn’t come from Galilee?” (42) Doesn’t the Scripture say that al-Masih will come from the descendants of Dawud, and from Bethlehem, the village where Dawud was (born)?” (43) Therefore there was a division in the crowd because of him. (44) And some of them wanted to arrest him but no one laid a hand on him.

⁷³¹ I consider John 7:25-31 to be one of those passages in which the evangelist intends to draw a distinction between the verb *oida* and *ginosko*, both meaning “to know.” Christ corrects their statement that no one knows *at all* (γινώσκει) where he (Jesus) is from (v. 27) in v. 28 by the use of the verb *oida* as supposed to *ginosko* as well as its repetition separated by the conjunction *kai* (οἶδατε καὶ οἶδατε) which renders his statement (while he “cried out”) as emphatic and intense. They *do* know where he is from, and know it well. The verse concludes by Jesus stating that his interlocutors, however, do not know *well* (οἶδατε) the One who sent him. The Qur’an argues that the *Ahl al-Kitab* يعرفونه كما يعرفون أبناءهم (“know him [the Prophet] like they know their own sons” [Q 6:20]), with the verb “to know” as *ya’rifu* (يعرف) as opposed to *ya’lamu* (يعلم); the former denoting a more refined or intimate type of knowledge (معرفة), yet many of them refuse to believe that he was sent by God. Likewise, Jesus’ interlocutors know Jesus quite well yet refuse to fully accept his messiahship and thus lack deeper knowledge of God Himself. This treatment of *oida* is confirmed by BDAG: to “be (intimately) acquainted with, stand in a (close) relation to οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον I have no knowledge of the man Mt 26:72, 74; cf. Mk 14:71; Lk 22:57. ὥστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οὐδέν᾽ αἰσθάνομεν κατὰ σάρκα 2 Cor 5: 16. - To know God, i.e. not only to know theoretically of his existence, but to have a positive relationship with him, or not to know God, i.e. to want to know nothing about him: 2 Th 1:8; Tit 1:16. - J 7:28b; 8:19 al.” BDAG, pg. 556.

⁷³² “on my own:” ἀπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ (lit. from myself).

(45) When the Temple guards came (back) to the chief priests and Pharisees, (the latter) asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him?” (46) The Temple guards answered, “Never has a person spoken like this!” (47) So the Pharisees answered them, “You haven’t also been deceived, have you?!” (48) Has a single (Jewish) leader or Pharisee believed in him? (49) But (only) this ignorant crowd that doesn’t know the Torah - they are accursed!” (50) Nicodemus, the one who came to him (‘Isa) previously (and) being one of them, said to them, (51) “Our Torah does not condemn someone unless it hears from him first and comes to know what he does, right?” (52) And they answered and said to him, “You are also not from Galilee, are you? Search (the Scriptures) and see (for yourself); *no* prophet will be raised from Galilee!”

The Apology of Christ II: He is the true Messiah

Here we have the final mention of the long-awaited Mosaic Prophet (see: John 1:21-25; 6:14) predicted in the famous “promise” (وعد) and “threat” (وعيد) passage of Deuteronomy 18:18-19 whom I had identified earlier as the Prophet Muhammad. The evangelist tells us that the “crowd” (ὄχλος) is divided (σχίσμα) about Jesus’ identity; some said that he was “the Prophet” (ὁ προφήτης) while others said “the Christ” (ὁ Χριστός). The Pharisees, however, who at this point do not seem to know anything about Jesus’ background except that he appears to have been born in Galilee, definitively say to Nicodemus that “no prophet will be raised from Galilee” (ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας προφήτης οὐκ ἐγείρεται [7:52.9]). From this comment, we learn that the Pharisees of that time believed that the Messiah would not only be a king but would also function as a prophet or sorts, but would not be “the Prophet.” Thus their comment to Nicodemus that (essentially): “Not a *single* prophet will be raised from Galilee” is intended to negate the possibility that Jesus is the Messiah (and thus *prophetic*) as well as the Mosaic Prophet of Deut. 18. In short, Jesus is a total imposter because *nothing good* (apparently) comes from Galilee (Nazareth) (John 1:46).

For the Johannine evangelist, the earthly beginnings of Jesus are not nearly as important as his celestial origins, thus John 7:42 contain the only two mentions of David in the entire Gospel of John (compared to seventeen by Matthew, seven by Mark, and twelve by Luke). The verse says, quoting the crowd: “The Scriptures say that the Messiah will come *from the seed of David* (ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ), and from Bethlehem, the village where David was (born), don’t they?” Contemporary Jewish critics of the New Testament such as Skobac or Singer point out that Jesus cannot be the Messiah since tribal identity is established patrilineally, and according to the New Testament, Jesus had no earthly father and his mother appears to have been a Levite. Key verses (*pesukhim*) in the *Nebbim* that are used to demonstrate the Davidic identity of the Messiah are Jeremiah 33:14-26, especially v. 15: “And in those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous branch to spring up from David and he shall make justice and righteousness upon the earth” (בְּיָמֵים הֵהֵם וּבְעֵת הַהִיא אֶצְמַח צֶדֶקָה וְעָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה בְּאֶרֶץ). Although many scholars such as Michaelis, Jahn, Movers, and Hitzig deem this entire passage spurious or even a later interpolation, due to its absence in the LXX, there are indeed several other *pesukhim* that support Maimonides’ commentary of his twelfth principle (עקר) that the Messiah must be from the “seed of King David” (זרע דוד המלך): Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; Ezekiel 34:23-24; II Samuel 7:8-14; I Chronicles 17:11-14, 22:9-10, 28:4-6; Psalm 89:3-4. Christians usually point to the genealogy of Jesus mentioned by Matthew which begins with Abraham and ends with Joseph (Matt. 1:1-16) whom they maintain was Jesus’ “legal father” which makes Jesus a descendant of David through adoption. The position that Jesus was not the biological son of Joseph also prevents him from falling under the “Blood Curse” of Jeconiah (יְכֹנְיָה) mentioned in Jer. 22:24-30 since Jeconiah

(Ιεχονίας) appears in the ancestry of Joseph (Matt. 1:11). But the Jewish argument would follow: if Christians are prepared to make Jesus the “legal son” of Joseph and append to him the latter’s Davidic ancestry, then Jeconiah would be included in that ancestry thus invalidating Jesus as the Messiah. The fact that Jesus has no biological connection to Jeconiah would make little difference *if* “legal adoption” in this way were even valid. However, there is a better way, in my view, to establish Jesus’ descendancy through David; a way that avoids Jeconiah altogether. A chapter after Mary utters the exquisite *Magnificat*, Luke gives us a second genealogy of Jesus that traces his lineage through Nathan (Luke 3:31), David’s other son, rather than Solomon (Matt. 1:6). Although we are told in Luke 3:23 that Jesus was “the son of Joseph,” there are good reasons for believing that Luke’s genealogy is actually that of Mary, Joseph’s wife. First of all, Luke says, “(Jesus) being *as was supposed* the son of Joseph [but actually] the descendant of ‘Eli” (ὡν ὡς ἐνομίζετο υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἑλὶ). Secondly, every single name in Luke’s genealogy is prefixed by the Greek definite article except for Joseph which may have indicated to the ancient reader/listener that this is actually *Mary’s* genealogy since it was uncustomary for Jewish genealogists to list the names of women. In fact, Fruchtenbaum of the “Jews for Jesus” movement mentions that the Talmud actually considers Luke’s genealogy to be that of Mary, and refers to Mary as the daughter of ‘Eli (Hagigah 2:4).⁷³³

Luke tells us that while Mary was the cousin of Elizabeth, the latter being the wife of the priest (כהן) Zacharias (Zakariyya), and therefore an Aaronic Levite from her mother’s side whose matrilineal priestly lineage is intimated in her family’s description of her as “sister of Aaron” (يأخت هرون) in Q 19:28.1, it is her father’s identity that will

⁷³³ See: <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/v05-n06/genealogy>

determine her actual tribal affiliation. And her father, ‘Eli, was from the House of David therefore making her a Davidic Judahite. This is supported by Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, and John Damascene. One may make the argument here that it would have been impermissible for Mary’s father, being a Judahite, to marry a Levite woman due to Levitical inter-tribal marriage restrictions. This restriction, however, is only for male *priests* (הַכֹּהֲנִים) according to Leviticus 21, and not for non-Levite men nor Levite women. Thus the miraculous conception of Jesus not only *symbolizes* his unique “sonship” to the Father otherwise known as his Christhood, but also establishes his Davidic descendancy from both of his “parents” either by legal adoption, thus (potentially) circumventing the “Blood Curse” of Jeconiah, or by blood from Mary. But this begs another question: If the Messiah was to be a descendant of David through his father, how can Jesus be the Messiah when he did not have a biological father? The answer is that the Messiah is exceptional and unique (مخصوص) in this regard. He takes his tribal affiliation from his mother because he was destined to be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). This may explain why the Qur’an, other than for reasons of theological critique, spells the name of Jesus by retaining the guttural *alif* of his matronymic (عيسى ابن مريم) - something totally *unique* to Jesus in the whole of Arabic orthography. It seems that the Qur’an wants to heavily stress that messianic prophecy finds its fulfillment in “the son of *Mary*.” Interestingly, when the *sadat* (سادة) trace their lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad, the final name on the list is that of ‘Ali (the *exact* cognate in Arabic [علي] of the Hebrew ‘Eli [עֲלִי]) who is *not* a direct descendant of the Prophet but rather the husband of the Prophet’s daughter Fatimah, who is honorifically called *al-Batul* (the Virgin) by the Sufis. Thus the Prophet Muhammad is also exceptional in that his lineage, the *Ahl al-Bayt*, is established through

his *daughter*, not a son nor male of some sort. The Prophet was given glad tidings of “great abundance” (كوثر) in his lineage, a Qur’anic *hapax legomenon* denoting Fatimah according to many exegetes, when the Pagan al-’Aus b. Wa’il disparagingly dubbed him “the (one) cut off” (الأبتر) due to the death of the Prophet’s sons Qasim and ‘Abdullah during their infancies.⁷³⁴ Both the son of ‘Ali and Fatimah (Husayn) as well as the grandson of ‘Eli and son of Mary (Jesus) were martyred by the civil authorities of their own people; both gave their lives to set virtuous examples of courage, grace, and sacrifice; and both are attributed famous passion narratives that have kindled the pathos of their followers and lovers for hundreds of years.

‘Isa is the Light Leading to the Episteme of the Father: Knowledge of the Messiah Leads to Knowledge of Allah

Chapter Eight: Verses 1-11, the *pericope adulterae*, are not authentic. (12) 'Isa again spoke to them saying, “I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will not *walk* in darkness, but will have the light of (eternal) life.” (13) Therefore the Pharisees said to him, “You are witnessing concerning yourself - your witness is not true.” (14) 'Isa answered and said to them, “Even if I witness concerning myself, my witness *is* true, because I know (well) where I came from and where I am going, but you don’t know where I come from nor where I am going. (15) You judge according to the flesh,⁷³⁵ but I don’t judge anyone. (16) And even if I do judge, my judgment is true, because I am not alone, but the Father who sent me (is with me). (17) And in your Torah it is written that the witnessing of two men is true and accurate. (18) I witness concerning myself and the Father who sent me (also) witnesses concerning me.” (19) So they said to him, “Where is your Father?” 'Isa answered, “Neither me nor my Father do you know; if you knew me, you would also know my Father.” (20) He spoke these words while teaching in the treasury of the Temple. And no one arrested him because his time had not yet come.

‘Isa Actualizes Islam; ‘Isa Only Does What is Pleasing to Allah

(21) Then again he said to them, “I am going and you will seek me, but you will die in your sins. Where I am going, you are not able to come. (22) Therefore the Jewish authorities said, “He is not going to kill himself, is he?⁷³⁶ Because he said,

⁷³⁴ Suyuti, *al-Jalalayn*, Q 108:3.

⁷³⁵ i.e. meaning “according to human standards... outward things, externals.” BDAG, 744. An example of this is found in 1 Cor. 1:26: σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα, wise according to human standards.

⁷³⁶ In the Greek, the authorities’ question, Μήτι ἀποκτενεῖ ἑαυτόν, expects a negative answer (The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader’s Edition, pg 272). Ironically, the Jewish authorities are on the right track

‘Where I am going, you are not able to come.’” (23) He said to them, “You are from below, while I am from above. You are from this world, while I am not from this world. (24) Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am (he), you will die in your sins.” (25) So they said to him, “Who are you?” ‘Isa said to them, “The one whom I have been telling you about since the start!” (26) I have many things to say about you and to condemn (concerning you), but (I won’t). Because I speak (only) those things which I heard from Him, the One who sent me - (and His words) are true. (27) They did not know that he was speaking about the Father to them. (28) Whenever you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am (he [al-Masih]), and on my own I do nothing,⁷³⁷ but just as the Father taught me, these things I speak. (29) And the One who sent me is with me, He has not left me alone because I always do the things pleasing to Him.” (30) After he was saying these things, many believed in him.

‘Isa’s Teaching is Freedom from Sin Through Love of God

(31) Therefore ‘Isa said to the Jewish authorities who had *believed* him,⁷³⁸ “If you remain in my word, truly you are my disciples (32) And you will come to know the truth, and the truth will release you (from spiritual enslavement).” (33) They answered him, “We are the seed of Ibrahim and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be made free?’” (34) ‘Isa answered them, “Indeed, I say to you: Every doer of sin is a slave to sin.”⁷³⁹ (35) And the slave does not remain in the house forever, the son remains forever. (36) Therefore if the Son should release you, then you will be *truly* free. (37) I know that you are the seed of Ibrahim, but you seek to kill me because my teaching finds no room in your (hearts). (38) The things I have *seen* (understood) while I was with the

of thought, however, their characterization of Jesus’ act of selfless sacrifice as “killing himself” misses the purpose of his death and willingness to die according to the well-pleasing will of God.

⁷³⁷ The authorities and general population will witness the death of Christ on the cross followed by his subsequent resurrection and ascension to God. At this point they will know that Jesus is the true Messiah, and not another messianic pretender who was killed by his opponents. In the words of Jesus, they will know that “I am (he)” (ἐγώ εἰμι).

⁷³⁸ This is an extremely difficult text for exegetes to deal with. Griffith suggests that the dative in v. 31 may express some sort of partial or “limited belief.” See: Terry Griffith, “‘The Jews Who Had Believed in Him’ (John 8:31) and the Motif of Apostasy in the Gospel of John,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 183. I agree; (πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ [pisteuw + dative]). These authorities had accepted as truth certain statements *previously* made by Jesus, but Jesus knows that his *subsequent* statements about Abraham and the Devil will not be accepted (believed) by them, hence John 8:45-46 (οὐ πιστεύετε μοι) translated as future tense according to context. Complete faith entails total submission to Christ’s words as already stated.

⁷³⁹ Ghazali said: “Whoever follows caprice is the servant of caprice, not the servant of God.” Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq said: “You are the servant of him in whose bondage and prison you are. If you are in prison to yourself, then you are the servant of yourself, and if you are in prison to this world of yours, then you are a servant of this world of yours.” Quoted from William C. Chittick, “Worship,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 223-224, citing Ghazali, *Ihya ‘ulum al-din*, 6 vols. (Cairo, 1992), III, 45 and al-Qushayri, *al-Risala*, ed. ‘Abd al-Halim Mahmud and Mahmud ibn al-Sharif (Cairo, 1972), 430.

Father I speak; while you do (only) the things which you have *heard* from the Father.”⁷⁴⁰

Ibrahim as a Model; Allah and the Devil as Spiritual Fathers

(39) They answered and said to him, “Our father is Ibrahim.” 'Isa said to them, “If you are the children of Ibrahim, then you would do the works of Ibrahim. (40) But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which he heard from Allah. *This*, Ibrahim did not do. (41) You do the works of your (real spiritual) father.” They said to him, “At least we were not born from illicit sex! We have one Father - Allah.” (42) 'Isa said to them, “If Allah were your Father, then you would love me (*agapistically*), for I came from Allah and I am here; for I have not come on my own but He sent me. (43) Why don't you understand what I am saying? - Because you are not able to hear my teaching. (44) You are (children) of (your) father, the devil, and the desires of (this) father of yours you want to do. That (devil) was a murderer from (the) beginning,⁷⁴¹ and does not stand in truth because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks according to his nature because he is a liar and the father of him (who lies). (45) Because I am speaking the truth, you will not believe me. (46) Who among you can convict me of (committing) a sin? If I am speaking the truth, why will you not believe me? (47) The one who is from Allah listens to (obeys) the words of Allah. For this reason, you do not listen: because you are not from Allah.

“Partial Faith” in Jesus

John 8 presents a heated argument between Jesus and the Jewish authorities about lineage that ends with an iconic, yet commonly misunderstood, ontological statement of Christ. Christ reveals to the Jewish authorities, those who had “accepted him,” that as a prophet and unique Son (Messiah) he experiences direct witnessing (مشاهدة) of God, or

⁷⁴⁰ Christ intimates his state of perpetual direct witnessing (مشاهدة) (*mystika theamata*) of the Father, indicative of his intimate relationship with God as well as his heightened sense of understanding His will. He contrasts his witnessing with the authorities' mere “hearing,” indicative of their lack of true understanding and distance from the Father. This is a break between Philo and John; namely that for the former, Israel's permanent vision (φαντασια) of God mediates His vision for others, while John sees Christ as the divine agent who mediates God's vision. See Winston, “Philo's Mysticism,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. VIII, ed. David T. Runia, 82.

⁷⁴¹ ἅπ' ἀρχῆς: from (the) beginning. According to the B-D-F (as stated) earlier, articles may be omitted in prepositional phrases yet rendering their nouns as definite. See: Blass, DeBrunner, Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*., 133. Recall that John 1:1.1 may be rendered: “In (the) Beginning was the Logos” meaning that the Logos *always* existed as an impersonal decree in the Omniscience of God. Similarly, it was decreed in pre-eternality that the Devil would be a murderer. If we take the anarthrous ἀρχῆς from ἅπ' ἀρχῆς as denoting a relative beginning, as we did in one version of John 1:1.1 (“At [the] beginning [of creation] was the Logos), then the Devil has been a murderer since the beginning of his creation, or since his respite granted by God after his rebellion.

“contemplative vision,” which is the “end” (نهاية) of spiritual combat (مجاهدة) according to Ibn ‘Ajibah. Thus he has *wilayah* (sanctification/divinization), “reached intimacy with God” (حصول الأنس) and “effacement in the Essence (تحقيق الفناء في الذات) after the sensory world has disappeared.”⁷⁴² Then Jesus challenges their claim that they are (spiritual) children or heirs of their great Patriarch - “If you are the children of Abraham, then the works of Abraham you would do.” The restoration of the tradition of Abraham and its adherence are also major themes of the early sections (اجزاء) of the Qur’an where the story of Jesus is told: Q 3:65, 67-68, 95 (“Say: God speaks the truth: Follow the way of Abraham, the true monotheist” [قُلْ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ فَاتَّبِعُوا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا]). According to Jesus, Abraham would not have killed the Messiah, as the Jewish authorities are attempting to do, thus they do naught but the works of their (real spiritual) father, Satan, as “conduct is the clue to paternity.”⁷⁴³ At this point, and in contrast to John 7, the Jewish authorities seem to have done some recent investigations into Jesus’ family background possibly in an earnest attempt to establish his Davidic roots and birth in Bethlehem. However, they seem to have dismissed his miraculous conception for a more natural yet morally problematic one, and they are now prepared to unleash their accusation. They retort, “At least *we* (emphatic) were not begotten from illicit sex (πορνείας)! We have one (spiritual) Father - God.” The Qur’an also confirms that the Jewish authorities *of Jesus’ day*, were levying this charge against him and his mother, and that this is not simply the opinions of

⁷⁴² Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 17-18.

⁷⁴³ See: JN Sanders, *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: University Press, 1943). The Qur’an says quoting Abraham: “Whoever follows me is of me” (فَمَنْ تَبِعَنِي فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي [Q 14:36.5]); the Companions of the Prophet are said to be upon the religion of their *father* Abraham: “The faith of your father Abraham” (مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ [Q 22:78.5]). To honor Christ is to follow Abraham as indicated by Jesus’ statement about Zacchaeus in Luke 19:10.9: “Because even he is a son of Abraham” (καθότι καὶ αὐτὸς υἱὸς Ἀβραάμ ἐστιν).

later rabbinical authorities who recorded them in the Babylonian Gemara.⁷⁴⁴ An *ayah* later, the Qur'an quotes these Jewish authorities contemporary to Jesus, who "had believed him" (πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ), as essentially boasting about killing him. But what does it mean to "believe" (*pisteuw* + dative) Jesus? The key phrase occurs in John 8:31, where the evangelist uses the phrase πεπιστευκότας (a perfect participle) followed by αὐτῷ (in the *dative*). This is contrasted with the disciples and others who ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν (*pisteuw* followed by *eis* then the *accusative*). As explained earlier, the former denotes a type of cautious trusting or acceptance, what Moloney calls "partial faith,"⁷⁴⁵ whereas the latter includes an element of love and *total* trust and adherence, thus I have translated the latter as: "(they) believed *in* him."⁷⁴⁶ It appears as if the Jewish authorities had accepted or assented to the rational proposition that Jesus was the Messiah and Messenger of God, but "believing in him" (totally) was only contingent upon Christ manifesting his political kingdom and ousting the Roman occupiers. Thus their half-

⁷⁴⁴ Dirks says: "Piecing together scattered Talmudic references to Jesus, one is informed that: 1) Mary (Miriam) was a promiscuous woman of ill-repute; 2) Mary was married to a Jew named Stada (aka Satra, Stara, and Sateda), although one passage lists her husband as having been a Jew named Pappos ben Yehuda (Pappos the son of Judah and lists Mary as being called Stada; 3) Mary had an adulterous affair with a Roman soldier named Pandera (aka Pantera); and 4) Jesus was the illegitimate offspring of Mary and Pandera, being thus referred to in the Babylonian Talmud both as Ben Stada (after his mother's husband) and Ben Pandera (after his biological father). Of note, Jesus is also called the son of Pandera in passages of the Tosefta (Tractate Hullin 2:22 and 2:24; the Tosefta is an early Jewish commentary much like the Mishnah) and the Jerusalem Talmud (Tractate Shabbat and Tractate Avodah Zarah)." See: Jerald F. Dirks, *What You Weren't Taught in Sunday School* (Beltsville: Amana, 2010), 253-254.

⁷⁴⁵ Moloney, SDB, *Love in the Gospel of the John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study*, 1-36.

⁷⁴⁶ Griffith, however, takes the position that the perfect participle followed by the dative (πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ) "requires a pluperfect meaning and that it refers to a group of apostates [6:66-72]. Jesus was speaking to those who had believed in him but did so no longer." See: Terry Griffith, "The Jews Who Had Believed in Him" (John 8:31) and the Motif of Apostasy in the Gospel of John," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 184. This is what the *context* suggests according to Griffith due to the fact that there is no pluperfect active participle in Greek. This is also the view of James Sweetnam, "The Meaning of πεπιστευκότας in John 8.31," in *Biblica* 61 (1980): 106-109. Dodd of course takes the passage to be a reflection of John's Dialogical aspect; that there were Jews who believed in Jesus at the time of the Gospel's composition who did not have a "high" enough Christology, or who were not willing to accept what the churches were now saying about Jesus in 90 CE or so. See: C.H. Dodd, "Behind a Johannine Dialogue," in his *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), 41-57.

hearted treatment of Christ and “watch and see” attitude, exemplified by Gamaliel’s statements in Acts 5:34-40 to the Sanhedrin, was similar to many of the Jews in Medina who accepted Muhammad as divine Messenger and righteous judge, yet considered his message as being limited only to the Arabs and preferred to wait for the outcome of the Prophet’s military campaigns before their serious consideration. They constructed Jesus on their own terms, not on the terms of his message. Thus the following two verses of the Qur’an are directly related to the dialogical aspect of John 8:

وَيَكْفُرْهُمْ وَقَوْلِهِمْ عَلَىٰ مَرْيَمَ بُهْتَنًا عَظِيمًا (١٥٦) وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتَّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا (١٥٧)

“And due to their blasphemy and utterance against Mary, a *grave calumny*; and their utterance, ‘Indeed we killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of God.’ But they did not kill him nor crucify him (cause him to die upon the cross), but it was made to appear so unto them...” (4:156-157.1).

Jesus does not defend himself in the face of personal slander; rather he continues to challenge the authorities who now have bypassed Abraham and claim the spiritual paternity of God Himself, while Jesus refers to them as “(children) of the devil”

(διάβολος). Notice that the “children of the devil” (Qur’anicallly: حزب الشيطان) are those who have *believed* that Jesus is the Messiah, yet refuse to obey and follow him,

regardless of their biological descent. This is the essence of infidelity (كفر). These

children are contrasted with the “children of God” (Qur’anicallly: حزب الله) who love Christ and submit to the teachings of the Gospel, regardless of their biological descent, for the true progeny of Abraham are those who follow him. As for these particular Jewish authorities, they “lie” about and “slander” Jesus while they apparently *know* that he speaks the truth: “If I speak the truth, why do you not believe in me” (John 8:46.9)? The Qur’an also defines true infidelity in these terms, again with the immediate context

referring to Jewish elements living in Medina: “Do not clothe the truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth, *while you have knowledge of it*” (وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ)!

أَسْتَحْذَرُ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانَ فَانْسَلُطُوا عَلَيْهِمْ ذَكَرَ اللَّهُ أَوْلِيَّكَ جَزَبَ الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَّا إِنَّ جَزَبَ الشَّيْطَانِ هُمْ الْخَاسِرُونَ (١٩) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحَادُّونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ - أَوْلِيَّكَ فِي الْأَذْلَى (٢٠) كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَأَعْلَبَنَّ أَنَا وَرَسُولِي إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ (٢١) لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ أَوْلِيَّكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُم بِرُوحٍ مِّنْهُ وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ أَوْلِيَّكَ جَزَبَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا إِنَّ جَزَبَ اللَّهِ هُمْ الْمَفْلُحُونَ (٢٢)

“Satan has overpowered them for he caused them to forget the remembrance of God. They are the *breed/children of Satan*; Lo! Indeed, the children of Satan are spiritual losers. Those who oppose God and His Sent One - Those are the debased! You will not find a people believing in God and the Last Day *philiopistically* loving anyone who opposes God and His Sent One, even though they may be their ancestors, progeny, brethren, tribe or clan - They are the ones upon whose spiritual hearts He (God) has inscribed *faith*, and has strengthened them with a Spirit from Him. And He will enter them into gardens under which rivers flow - eternally abiding therein. God well-pleased with them and they with Him. They are the *breed/children of God*! Lo! Indeed, the children of God are spiritual winners” (Q 58:19-22).

The Precedence of 'Isa Over Ibrahim

(48) The Jewish authorities answered and said to him, “Aren’t we right when we say that you are a Samaritan and have a devil” (49) 'Isa answered, “I don’t have a devil, but I honor my father and you dishonor me. (50) And I don’t seek my (own) glory; the One who seeks (to glorify me) and condemn (others is Allah). (51) Indeed, I say to you: If a person keeps my teaching, he shall never ever see death!” (52) Therefore the Jewish authorities said to him, “Now we know that you have a devil! Ibrahim died, also the Prophets, yet you say, ‘If someone should keep my teaching, he shall never ever taste death?’ (53) You are not greater than our father Ibrahim, who died, are you? Also the Prophets died. Who do you think you are?” (54) 'Isa answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is *nothing*. My Father is the One who glorifies me, the one about whom you say, ‘Allah is our Father.’ (55) *But you don’t know Him at all, while I know Him intimately*. And if I say that I do not know Him intimately, then I would be like you, a liar. But I do know him intimately, and I keep His teaching. (56) Ibrahim, your ‘father,’ rejoiced that he might see my day, and he saw it and was happy.” (57) At this, the Jewish authorities said to him, “You are not even fifty years old⁷⁴⁷ and you have seen Ibrahim?” (58) 'Isa said to them, “Indeed, I say to you: *Before Ibrahim was (born),⁷⁴⁸ I am he (al-Masih)!*” (59) Therefore they picked up stones to throw at him, but 'Isa hid himself and went out of the Temple.

⁷⁴⁷ St. Irenaeus claimed, based on this verse, that Jesus was actually crucified in his fifties, as an “oldish man” (*Adv. haer.* 2:22:4-6).

⁷⁴⁸ See: B-D-F, p. 395-396, sect. 395: The infinitive with πρῖν.

The Great Station of the Christ

The only response from the authorities, which is indicative of their *kufri*, is to slander Jesus by calling him a Samaritan and demon-possessed as well as deliberately misrepresenting him. Whereas Jesus says that those who keep his teaching “will never ever *see* death” (θάνατον οὐ μὴ θεωρήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα [8:51.9]), meaning that they will not die a *spiritual* death, the authorities, presumably raising their voices for the crowd to hear, quote him as saying that they “will never *taste* death” (οὐ μὴ γεύσῃται θανάτου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα [8:52.9]), possibly implying that Jesus is teaching some sort of strange somatic immortality, and knowing that, in the words of the Qur’an, “every soul is a taster (ذَائِقَةٌ) of death” (Q 21:35.1), that is to say, every soul will *experience*⁷⁴⁹ death. This is misquotation number one. Whereas, Jesus says that *Abraham* “saw his (the Messiah’s) day and rejoiced” (ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη [8:56.9]; probably referring to the *Aqaydah* passage of Genesis 22),⁷⁵⁰ the authorities claim Jesus *himself* is claiming to have seen Abraham (Ἀβραὰμ ἑώρακας [8:57.9]). This is misquotation number two. Some would call these simple misunderstandings, but I believe that these are in fact deliberate misrepresentations meant to indict Jesus before the crowds and start rumors of blasphemy. Indeed, the Qur’an says, “Some of the Jewish (authorities) change (distort) words from proper places and they say, ‘We hear but we disobey...’” (مِنْ الَّذِينَ هَادُوا) [Q 4:45.1]).

⁷⁴⁹ BDAG, 157.

⁷⁵⁰ “*Genesis Rabbah* 44:25ff, (cf. 59:6) states that Rabbi Akiba, in a debate with Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, held that Abraham had been shown not this world only but the world to come (this would include the days of the Messiah)” See: <https://bible.org/seriespage/exegetical-commentary-john-8>

The chapter ends with Jesus declaring, “Indeed, I say to you: Before Abraham was (born), I am he (the Messiah)” (ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμὶ [8:58]), prompting the authorities to pick up stones. Trinitarian exegetes invariably tell us that Jesus is claiming to be God in this statement because he apparently applies the name of God given to Moses in Exodus 3:14 to himself. W. Hall Harris III says for instance, “The meaning of Jesus’ statement is: ‘Before Abraham came into existence I, the ‘I AM,’ eternally was, am now, and shall be.’ Here is an explicit claim to deity...”⁷⁵¹ Brown says: “No clearer implication of divinity is found in the Gospel tradition.”⁷⁵² Examining Jesus’ statement, however, linguistically and contextually reveals something quite different. First of all, the Greek of Exodus 3:14 in the LXX reads: καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωϋσῆν ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ εἶπεν οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς. The translators of the LXX understood the Hebrew phrase *אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה* to mean ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ ὢν (“I am He who is [Eternal]; the One who has necessary non-contingent existence”), represented by the masculine article (ὁ) followed by the present active participle (ὢν) in Greek. The first part of the statement (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) simply means “I am” in everyday Greek speech; the LXX translators did not consider this to denote anything other than how we use the phrase in English, such as in the statement, “*I am* a professor;” this use of the formula, as a description of the subject, was classified by Bultmann as *Qualifikationsformel*.⁷⁵³ In John 9:9, the blind man healed by Christ confesses to his neighbors ἐγὼ εἰμὶ; certainly he is not claiming to be God. The blind man’s statement was scandalous not because he *said* ἐγὼ εἰμὶ, but because he *claimed* to be the one healed

⁷⁵¹ See: <https://bible.org/seriespage/exegetical-commentary-john-8>

⁷⁵² Raymond E. Brown S.S., *The Gospel According to John I-XII, The Anchor Bible vol. 29* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1966), 367.

⁷⁵³ *ibid*, 533.

yet born blind. The most crucial part of Exodus 3:14 in the LXX comes when God tells Moses, “Thus you will say to the children of Israel ‘*He who is*’ (ὁ ὢν) sent me to you.” Thus the *second* part of the statement (ὁ ὢν) constitutes a Divine attribute, yet Jesus *never* says that anywhere in the Gospel of John, but always just ἐγώ εἰμι. Nearly all Christian English translations of John 8:58 render ἐγώ εἰμι as “I AM” or “I am” with no *predicate* (KJV, NKJV, NLT, NIV, ESV, HCSB, NASB, NET, RSV, YLT, DBY, WEB, HNV) while *none* of the above translations render the blind man’s confession of ἐγώ εἰμι in those terms, but rather “I am he” or “It is I” - *Prasentationsformel*.⁷⁵⁴ From a grammatical standpoint, leaving ἐγώ εἰμι as “I am” (or “I AM”) without adding the implied predicate, “he,” leaves the sentence somewhat incomplete and incoherent. However Christian translators want to place their readers under the impression that Jesus is uttering the Divine *Name* that God gave to Moses, in essence saying, “Before Abraham was, I am (meaning God).” But as we have seen, the Name is definitely *not* ἐγώ εἰμι, as this simply constitutes the subject and copula of the true Name, ὁ ὢν, which follows as a predicate. In John 8:58, however, the crucial predicate containing the Name is not given by Jesus thus a predicate must be provided by a translator, namely “he” after εἰμι, which is perfectly normal and correct when dealing with εἰμι,⁷⁵⁵ and in this case necessary for the statement to be grammatically correct, *unless* we take the εἰμι itself as the predicate meaning “to be”,⁷⁵⁶ or as Brown contends, ἐγώ εἰμι is being used absolutely.⁷⁵⁷ With respect to the former, the author of Hebrews uses ἔστιν in this manner when he says: “... for it is necessary for the one coming to God to believe that He exists (ἔστιν)” (Heb.

⁷⁵⁴ *ibid.* This is an introduction, or answers the question, “Who are you?”

⁷⁵⁵ BDAG, 223.

⁷⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁵⁷ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 533.

11:6.5). In this case, Jesus would be saying something to the effect of, “Before Abraham was (born) I exist(ed).” It is also possible to take εἰμι as a historical present, which according to some commentators, occurs in John 5:2,⁷⁵⁸ giving the meaning of “I have been (and continue to be).” But as I stated, most Christians see the *Divine Name* in 8:58. Jesus does not say, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί ὁ ὢν, nor does he say, as almost all Christian translations suggest, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ὁ ὢν; the latter, although containing the *Nomen Sacrum* becomes just as incomprehensible as what 8:58 actually says, namely, “Before Abraham was, He who is.” In other words, both components, ἐγὼ εἰμί and ὁ ὢν must be present for a deity claim to be made from a Jewish context *and* understood from a grammatical Greek standpoint. For instance, we are told in Revelation 1:6-8 that it was Christ who “made us kings and priests unto (the) God (τῷ θεῷ) and (who is also) his Father (πατρὶ αὐτοῦ),” thus reminding the reader of John 17:3 and 20:17 where we are told that “the Father” is “the only one truly God” as well as the *God of Jesus* himself. Then “the Lord God” (κύριος ὁ θεός) is quoted, who is referred to as “Almighty” (παντοκράτωρ), a title of “the Father” even according to the Nicene Creed, saying, ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ὁ παντοκράτωρ (Rev. 1:8). If we remove the words “the Alpha and the Omega” from the first part of the verse we get, “The Lord God says: I am He who is...” (ἐγὼ εἰμι λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός ὁ ὢν). This is what the Father says, *not* the Son. The Gospel of John was written over a span of seventy years (from Jerusalem to Ephesus), thus the Johannine community, as guided by the Spirit, was very *precise* about the wording of their Gospel; they could have easily put the words ὁ ὢν into the mouth of Jesus in 8:58, but did not do so.

⁷⁵⁸ I will produce the text of this verse in chapter seven of the present work, *Deo volente*.

With respect to Brown's claim that ἐγώ εἰμι can be used in an absolute sense, this does not help the Trinitarian cause. To translate 8:58, as Brown does, as: "Before Abraham even came into existence, I AM,"⁷⁵⁹ suggests again that Christ is using the Divine Name ὁ ὢν, which clearly he is not. Therefore, *who* Jesus is actually claiming to be in his many ἐγώ εἰμι statements must be ascertained by looking at the context. As I said earlier, the very first ἐγώ εἰμι statement is made in John 4:26 when Jesus claims to be *the Messiah*: "The woman said to him, 'I know fully well that the Messiah, who is called Christ, will come; and when he comes, he will explain to us all things.' Jesus said to her, *"I am he (ἐγώ εἰμι) - the one speaking to you!"*" When translating *this* verse, *all* of the above mentioned English translations rendered ἐγώ εἰμι as "I am he!" by providing the implied predicate (he). The reason for this is obvious; asserting that Jesus is claiming deity here simply does not fit the context and actually makes the exchange sound quite ridiculous. The Samaritan woman is clearly asking Jesus about the Messiah; "he will explain to us all things" - to which he replies, "I am *God*, the one speaking to you." (?) We also notice that the Messiah's exalted title, according to John 1:49, 11:27, and 20:31 is "the Son of God" (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), thus Messiah (Christ) and the Son of God are synonymous. For example: "She said to him, 'Yes, Master! I have *already* believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.' And having said this, she (Martha) went and called Mary, her sister, and said to her secretly, 'The teacher is present and calls for you'" (John 11:27-28). The evangelist is using "the Son of God" in v. 27 and "her sister" in v. 28 as adjectival explanatory phrases or permutatives to describe the preceding nouns "Messiah" and "Mary" respectively; in other words, the

⁷⁵⁹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 533.

Messiah *is* the Son of God and Mary *is* her (Martha's) sister. This is important because after Jesus declares that he and the Father are one (John 10:30), he *unequivocally tells us* who he has been claiming to be this whole time and wonders why the Jewish authorities pick up stones: "If those He called 'gods' to whom the word of God came, and the Scriptures cannot be ignored, then why do you say to the one whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You blaspheme,' because *I said I am the Son of God* (εἶπον Υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ εἰμι)? - meaning "I said I am the Messiah." And of course, the evangelist tells us at the near end of the Gospel, "But these things have been written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God..." (John 20:31.1). All of the ἐγὼ εἰμι statements are clearly claims of messiahship and never deity.⁷⁶⁰ However Brown claims: "There is not much in the context of the Johannine passages that would incline us to think that Jesus is speaking of messiahship"⁷⁶¹ (!). It is my contention that there is no "absolute usage" of ἐγὼ εἰμι in the Gospel of John, contra Brown. "According to Daube, T.W. Manson has proposed that the formula really means, 'The Messiah is here'"⁷⁶² in (John 8:24, 28, 58, 13:19).

⁷⁶⁰ In Mark 14:62 and Luke 22:70, when Jesus is asked point-blank if he is the "the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed God," and "The Son of God" respectively, Jesus responds: ἐγὼ εἰμι ("I am [he]"). This response provokes charges of blasphemy not because it is the Divine Name, but because Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah while, according to the authorities, he has not fulfilled the requisites of the Messiah. In Mark 13:6 and Luke 21:8, Jesus warns his people by saying: "Many will come in my name saying 'I am (he)'" (ἐγὼ εἰμι). The parallel passage in Matthew (24:5) has Jesus say: "For many will come in my name saying, 'I am the Christ'" (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ Χριστός); Matthew makes it easy for us by supplying the correct explicit predicate. Jesus continues to foretell the coming of "pseudo-prophets" (ψευδοπροφῆται) and "pseudo-Christ," (ψευδόχριστοι) not false gods. Enigmatically, however, Brown classifies this usage as similar to "the absolute Johannine usage," which I repudiate the existence of (Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 533). Lastly, the phrase "in my name" simply means that these future messianic pretenders will claim to be "Jesus" in his *Parousia* or claim to be in the true spirit of his teachings, not gods in the flesh.

⁷⁶¹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 533.

⁷⁶² *ibid.* Brown even sees an absolute usage of *ego eimi* in the LXX of Deutero-Isaiah, for example: Isa. 43:25.1 (אֲנִי אֶנֶכִּי הוּא מִחָה כְּשֶׁעָיִד), in the LXX (ἐγὼ εἰμι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἐξαλείφων τὰς ἀνομίας σου), "I am, I am the one who blots out your transgressions," which he claims can be interpreted "I am 'I AM' who blots out transgressions," with the second *ego eimi* being both an absolute and a predicate for the first (*The Gospel According to John*, 536).

When we look at the context of John 8:58, the discussion is about Abraham as a spiritual father and Israelite progenitor. We have already established that ἐγώ εἰμι is not the Divine Name, but why do the Jews pick up stones against Jesus if he did not claim to be God? Perhaps he claimed to be a certain *type* of Messiah that the Jews did not expect; they wanted him to manifest an earthly kingdom and oppose the Romans militaristically, while Jesus confesses (later to Pilate) that his kingdom is “not of this world.” Jesus claims to be preeminent over Abraham, that is to say, either greater in *rank* than the one in whom the authorities take so much pride, or preeminent in the sense of temporal pneumatic priority - that Jesus literally predates Abraham in the creation of his blessed soul. Another possibility, which I do not endorse, is that perhaps the statement “Before Abraham was” was a popular oath formula (قسم) which one would utter in order to highly emphasize the veracity of his following statement (جواب القسم). For instance: “Before Abraham was (I swear that it was decreed and pleasing to God), I did not lie to my mother!” Whichever way we take it, it was a very powerful way of Jesus intimating/defending his legitimacy as the Messiah, and is similar to Muhammad’s statement (which I translated earlier as), “Before Adam was I am (he),” intimating his mastery over all the progeny of Adam. In fact, the Israelites even picked up stones against Moses, the one upon whom the Jews “have placed their hopes” (John 5:45) according to Exodus 17:4. Or perhaps the Jews pick up stones against Jesus simply to instigate the crowd and onlookers, which seems to have been their intention earlier by twice misquoting him before the crowds, in effect attempting to suggest that Jesus was teaching blasphemous doctrines foreign to Judaism. Perhaps the authorities were made aware of what the crowds were saying among themselves a chapter earlier: “Behold! He

speaks in public (like this) and they say nothing to him. Perhaps the (Jewish) leaders truly know that *this is the Messiah*” (John 7:26). Thus the “picking up of stones” against Jesus represents a melodramatic public display of Pharisaic disapproval for Jesus motivated by treachery and intended to communicate to the Jewish populace that Jesus certainly does not have rabbinical support for his claim of *messiahship*.

سرت من بيت المقدس إلى مدينة بيت لحم فوجدت على طريقي عين سلوان. وهي العين التي أبرأ فيها السيد المسيح الضريب الأعمى. ولم تكن له قبل ذلك عينان.

“I traveled from Jerusalem to the city of Bethlehem and on my way I found the pool of Siloam; it is the pool with which the lord Christ healed the blind man, the one who was born without sight.” -al-Idrisi⁷⁶³

The Sixth Sign: The Healing of the Man Born Blind

Chapter Nine: (1) And as 'Isa passed by, he saw a man who was blind since birth. (2) And his disciples asked him saying, “Rabbi, who sinned? - This (man) or his parents so that he was born blind?” (3) 'Isa answered, “Neither this (man) nor his parents sinned, but so that the works of Allah might be manifested in him. (4) It is necessary for *us* to do the works of the One who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. (5) As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (6) Having said these things, he spat on the ground, made mud from the saliva, and smeared the mud on his (the blind man’s) eyes. (7) Then he said to him, “Go and wash yourself in the pool of Siloam,” which means “Sent.” Therefore, the man went and washed himself and came seeing. (8) Therefore the neighbors and those who saw him previously as a beggar were saying, “Isn’t this the one who sits and begs?” (9) Some were saying, “This is (him),” while others said, “No, but he looks like him.” He (the blind man) was saying, “I am (him)!” (10) They said to him, “How then were your eyes opened?” (11) He answered, “The man who is called 'Isa made mud and smeared it on my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash yourself.’ Then having gone and washed myself, I gained sight.” (12) And they said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I don’t know.”

Rejection of the Messiah is Spiritual Blindness; Reverence for the Spiritual Master

(13) They brought the man who was once blind to the Pharisees. (14) And it was the Sabbath on the day that 'Isa made mud and opened his eyes. (15) Therefore again the Pharisees began asking him how he gained his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed myself, and (now) I see!” (16) Then some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from Allah, because he does

⁷⁶³ Muhammad Al-Idrisi (d. 560/1165, Lat. Dreses, Muslim cartographer), *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq* (his geographic encyclopedia); Arabic text quoted from Haywood & Nahmad, *A New Arabic Grammar* (London: Lund Humphries, 1965), 345.

not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a sinning man do such signs?” And there was a division among them. (17) Therefore they spoke to the blind man again, “What do you say about him - because he opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

(18) The Jewish authorities did not believe about him that he had been blind and received sight until they called the parents of the one who received his sight. (19) So they asked them saying, “Is this your son whom you say was born blind? How does he now see?” (20) His parents answered and said, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. (21) But how he now sees, we don’t know! Ask him. His is an adult. He will speak for himself.” (22) These things his parents said because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. For already the Jewish authorities had agreed that anyone who confessed (‘Isa as) al-Masih, would be expelled from the synagogue. (23) Because of this his parents said, “He is an adult. Ask him.”

(24) They called the man who had been blind a second time and said to him, “Give glory to Allah! (*Take an oath to Allah!*)⁷⁶⁴ We know that this man is a sinner.” (25) He answered, “If he is a sinner, I don’t know; one thing I do know is that although I was blind, now I see.” (26) They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” (27) He answered them, “I told you already but you did not listen! Why *again* do you want to hear it? You don’t also want to become his disciples, do you?” (28) And they insulted him and said, “You are that man’s disciple; we are disciples of Musa!” (29) We know that to Musa⁷⁶⁵ Allah has spoken, but as for this man, we don’t know where he is from.” (30) The man answered and said to them, “How extraordinary! You don’t know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes! (31) We know that Allah does not listen to (the prayers of) sinners, but if someone is pious and does His will, He listens to him. (32) Never has it been heard that someone opened the eyes of a person born blind. (33) If this (man) were not from Allah, he would not be able to do anything.” (34) They answered and said to him, “You were born wholly in sin, and you are trying to teach us?!” And they threw him *outside*.

(35) ‘Isa heard that they threw him outside so he found him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (36) He answered and said, “And who is he, Sir, so I might believe in him?” (37) ‘Isa said to him, “You have both seen him and are speaking with him (now)!” (38) So he said, “I believe, Master!” And he revered him. (39) And ‘Isa said, “For rendering judgment have I come into this world, so that those not seeing may see and those seeing may become blind. (40) And some of the Pharisees with him heard these things so they said, “We are not also blind, are we?” (41) ‘Isa said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now since you *claim* that you can see, your sin remains.”

⁷⁶⁴ Jojka takes this statement of the authorities (δὸς δόξαν τῷ θεῷ! [9:24.5]) as constituting an oath formula and I agree with her. Cf. Bernadeta Jojka, *Worshipping the Father in Spirit and Truth: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Jn. 4:20-26 in Light of the Relationships Among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2012), 143. It is used in Joshua 7:19: וְיִשָּׁרָאֵל יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (“Give glory to the Lord God of Israel!”).

⁷⁶⁵ In the Greek, “Moses” (in the dative) is fronted before the verb for emphasis (ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν ὅτι Μωσῆ λελάληκεν ὁ θεός).

Spiritual Vision and Blindness

Just as we encountered with the journey “from Cana to Cana” section of the Gospel of John (2:1-4:46), John 9 masterfully describes a journey to faith as well as a journey to infidelity. Brown says: “This is a story of how a man who sat in darkness was brought to see the light, not only physically but spiritually. On the other hand, it is also a tale of how those who thought they saw (the Pharisees) were blinding themselves to the light and plunging into darkness. The story starts in vs. 1 with a blind man who will gain his sight; it ends in vs. 41 with the Pharisees who have become spiritually blind.”⁷⁶⁶ Brown also points out that the blind man, while “truly gaining knowledge, humbly confesses his ignorance”⁷⁶⁷ three times (9:12, 25, 36); and “three times the Pharisees, who are really plunging deeper into abysmal ignorance of Jesus, make confident statements about what they know of him (9:16, 24, 29).”⁷⁶⁸ The blind man is open to spiritual guidance *because* he has emptied (تخلية, *catharsis*) himself and is ready to receive the “living waters” of salvation (تجليه, *theoria*), while the Pharisees are spiritually blinded/deluded (غور) by what they *suppose* to know. The Qur’an describes this Pharisaic state by saying: “For indeed their eyesight is not blind, rather the hearts in their chests are blind” [Q 22:46.9] (فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ). The layer of their spiritual hearts which represents the seat of faith (إيمان), known as the *qalb* (قلب), and residing within the outer layer and seat of exoteric knowledge (علم), known as the *sadr* (صدر) is blind. In other words, their lack of faith is a direct result of their superficial judgment of outward appearances thus rendering them imperceptive to the reality of Jesus

⁷⁶⁶ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 377.

⁷⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁸ *ibid.*

- “Do not judge according to outward appearances, but judge rightly and justly!” (John 7:24). In this they imitate Satan who judged Adam strictly on an exoteric (ظاهري) basis, and are thus called “his children.”

As mentioned earlier, Sufi Masters such as the great Hadhrami mystic Shaykh Abu Bakr b. Salim (d. 992/1583) would affect transformative states in simple and gruff bedouins who would urinate in public by simply glancing (نظرة) at them, but also complained about city folk, “full of themselves,” who would sit for hours and benefit nothing. The irony with the Pharisees is that despite their insistence that they “know” things, what they absolutely *need* to know, where Jesus comes from, escapes them. When it comes to the blind man, believing in Jesus as “a prophet” (anarthrous) is not enough. This constitutes only partial faith. By the end of the chapter, however, he comes to embrace Jesus (quite literally) as one who is “from God” and the “Son of Man,” the latter being a title of the Messiah which seems to be linked to his work on the cross.

Moloney also points out that the pool of Siloam, used for “ritual lustrations”⁷⁶⁹ (*wudhu*), contained the only “living waters” in the city of Jerusalem; that is to say, it was the only natural spring in the city whose waters flowed from the belly of the earth and were thus unlimited⁷⁷⁰ - similar to the well of Zam Zam in Mecca. Already Jesus had said, “The one who believes in me, as the Scripture said, from his innermost being (κοιλία)⁷⁷¹ will flow rivers of *living water* (ὕδατος ζῶντος)” (John 7:38). According to Ibn ‘Ajibah, the “innermost being” (*al-sirr*) is similar to the spirit (*ruh*, *pneuma*), “but of

⁷⁶⁹ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 205.

⁷⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 117-142.

⁷⁷¹ “Denotes the hidden, innermost recesses of the human body... The κοιλία is where the καρδιά is found” (BDAG, 437).

a higher nature by virtue of its more perfect attributes.”⁷⁷² It is the “subtle and divine entity” (اللطيفة الربانية) according to al-Sahili.⁷⁷³ The evangelist tells us that “*Siloam*” means “Sent,” presumably in Hebrew, although more correctly “*Shiloakh*.” Thus Jesus is “the Sent one” (الرسول) and the real means of attaining spiritual “living waters.” It was through the blind man’s *contact* with Jesus (the *Shiloakh*) which healed him and enabled him to have true (in)sight. I believe that the Birth Narrative (*Mawlid*) of Jesus in the Qur’an contains an allusion to John 9 when Mary is told to drink from the spring of water underneath her which eases her mind as well as heals her body after her difficult delivery. Thus the Gospel and Qur’an are in agreement: Contact with Jesus heals holistically. Likewise, we read in *hadith* literature that waters once flowed from the very fingers of the Prophet Muhammad which allowed a group of travelers to make their ablutions as well as quench their thirsts. Thus Muhammad, like Jesus before him, *is* the living waters and source of abundance (*kawthar*) of God’s grace by God’s leave. The poet said: “The most exalted of waters was the water that flowed from between the fingers of the obeyed Prophet!” (افضل المياء ماء قد نبع, بين اصابع النبي المتبع). Imam ‘Izzuddin b. ‘Abd al-Salam (d. 660/1261) mentions in his book *The Beginning of Inquiry into the Eminence of the Messenger* (بداية السؤل في تفضيل الرسول), that compared to the miracles of previous prophets, Muhammad’s miracles are greater (أكبر) and more apparent (أظهر). For instance, Moses struck a rock that caused water to pour forth, while Muhammad split the moon and poured water from his fingers. Similarly, while Jesus healed a blind man’s eyes, Muhammad healed a man’s eye on the day of Uhud after *replacing* it into its socket.

⁷⁷² Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 34.

⁷⁷³ Quoted from: *ibid*.

However, the evangelist makes it clear here that Jesus' healing of the man's eyes was unlike anything that had ever happened for "never was it heard that someone opened the eyes of a person *born* (γεγεννημένου) blind" (9:32). Interestingly, Jesus is quoted in the Qur'an as saying: "I heal him who was *born blind*" (Q 3:49.5). The word in Arabic for one "born blind" (الأكمه) is distinct from one who lost his eyesight during his life (الاعمى), used in Q 80:1. I believe that this is yet another intertextual Qur'anic allusion to the *Injil* (the Gospel of John), as no other Christian source mentions this miracle.

Eventually the man born blind is cast out of the synagogue with a very emphatic statement in the Greek (ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω; lit. "They threw him out, *outside*"). But before the authorities throw him out "on his head," as it were, they comment: "In total sin were you born, and now *you* are teaching us?!" - a statement that is in reality directed to *Jesus himself*, given their allegations of illegitimacy. Apparently many Jews believed that children born with defects must have been a type of divine punishment for the sins of his parents, or even "pre-natal" sins committed by the fetus. Jesus assures his Disciples, however, that the man was born blind "so that the *works of God* (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ) might be manifested in him" (9:3). Christ is the pure action of God; his actions are God's actions in accordance to God's well-pleasing Will. The Father loves the Son, therefore the Father is the "eye by which (the Son) sees, the hand by which (the Son) holds, and the foot by which (the Son) walks."⁷⁷⁴ Here I agree with Irenaeus that Christ mirrors the actions of God,⁷⁷⁵ but not because he *is* God, but because he is united with God on the level of God's desiderative Will. Although many exegetes contend that such

⁷⁷⁴ This is a paraphrase of the famous *Hadith Qudsi* of Bukhari which Imam al-Junayd interpreted as denoting subjective *tawhid* (الإستغراق).

⁷⁷⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. Hae.* 5.15.2.

excommunication from the synagogue (ἀποσυνάγωγος) is anachronistic (Barrett) in first-century Palestine (along with the phrase “the Jews” when referring to Jesus’ opponents), ever since Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple mentioned in John 2, a rabbinical ban on Christic (عيساوي) Jews from entering synagogues *locally* around Jerusalem is very likely, especially given Jesus’ growing popularity and following in the holy city.⁷⁷⁶

After the man is cast outside, Jesus “found him” and asked him if he believed in the Son of Man. The man born blind does not seem to recognize Jesus at all (this is the first time he actually sees him) thus addresses Jesus as κύριε which I have translated here as “Sir,” but confides his *willingness* to believe. Perhaps the man recognized Jesus’ voice upon hearing the latter’s next statement: “You have both seen him, and are speaking with him (now)!” The man puts two and two together and now knows that “the man who is called Jesus,” as he put it earlier, and the Son of Man are one and the same. The man exclaims, “I believe, O *Master* (also κύριε)!” Thus the man’s journey of faith is made complete. His willingness to both admit his ignorance and be open to faith were the keys to arriving to truth. The Prophet Muhammad said, “Consider yourself lowly in the world, and God will love you.”⁷⁷⁷ Such lowliness or detachment (*zuhd*), according to Ibn ‘Ajibah, “is both the means by which we journey (السير) and the arrival (الوصول). For a heart attached to something other than the Beloved, there is no journey.”⁷⁷⁸ The healed man’s parents were held back by attachment in the form of *fear*. In contrast, the Pharisees’ self-assurance and presumed certainty - “claiming that they can see” - as well

⁷⁷⁶ See Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 324; Moloney S.D.B., *The Gospel of John*, 298; J Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 46-68 for commentary on exclusion from the synagogue.

⁷⁷⁷ ازهد في الدنيا يحبك الله (*Hadith of al-Bayhaqi*).

⁷⁷⁸ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 7.

as their unwillingness to open their hearts to Jesus and seriously entertain him as the Messiah on *his own terms*, have landed them in a quagmire of infidelity. The story of the man born blind also serves as a lesson for the Muslim reader; the Muslim must not insist that Jesus was “only a prophet,” as this constitutes only partial faith. According to the Gospel (إنجيل), one must confess that Jesus is the Messiah (المسيح) and the Son of Man (ابن الإنسان).

The Man Born Blind: A Journey to Faith (based on Maloney and Brown):

NO FAITH: His name is Jesus: ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰησοῦς (9:11).

Admission of ignorance: Οὐκ οἶδα (9:12).

PARTIAL FAITH: Confession: προφήτης ἐστίν (9:17).

Admission of ignorance: οὐκ οἶδα (9:25).

PARTIAL FAITH: Confession: παρὰ θεοῦ (9:33).

Admission of ignorance: τίς ἐστιν (9:36).

COMPLETE FAITH: Confession κύριε πιστεύω (9:38).

The Reverence of Christ

In v. 38, we are told that the man προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ, which the vast majority of the afore-mentioned English translations render as, “he worshipped him (Jesus).” Harris maintains that the man intended to worship Jesus in the same way in which God is worshipped since the evangelist uses the same verb, namely προσκυνέω, to refer to the worship of God in John 4. However, just as we have seen with the difficult word *kurios*, the evangelist often uses the same word to denote vastly different meanings.⁷⁷⁹ Speaking

⁷⁷⁹ See: BDAG, 716-717. The following is an excerpt from its definition: With respect to humans: προσκυνέω (κυνέω ‘to kiss’) impf. προσεκύουν; fut. προσκυνήσω; 1 aor. προσεκύνησα (trag., Hdt.+). Freq. used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment, the ground, etc.; the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity or someth. holy.) to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully a. to human beings, but by this act they are to be recognized as belonging to a superhuman realm (Appian, Mithrid. 104 §489: Pompey; Galen, Protr. 5 p. 12, 2ff ed. WJohn: Socrates, Homer, Hippocrates, Plato): to a king (so Hdt. et al.; cp. 2 Km 18:28; 24:20; 3 Km 1:16, 53. On proskynesis in the Hellenistic ruler cults s. LTaylor, JHS 47, 1927, 53ff, The Divinity of the Rom. Emperor ’31, esp. 256–66; against her WTarn, Alexander the Great II, ’50, 347–73) ὁ δοῦλος προσεκύνει αὐτῷ Mt 18:26 (of a female slave toward her κύριος PGiss 17, 11f=Mitt-Wilck, I/2, 481; s. Jos., Ant. 2, 11); to Peter by Cornelius Ac 10:25 (cp. Apollonius [c. 197 AD] in Eus., HE 5, 18, 6).—The church at

of John 4, one of the lessons that Jesus taught the Samaritan woman was that God is all-encompassing (Qur'anically: الواسع); He is not bound by space-time for “God is a Spirit” (John 4:24.1), while Christ is flesh and blood located in time and space. Thus according to the LSC,⁷⁸⁰ the verb προσκυνέω (in LXX and NT) is “used of homage shown to men and beings of superior rank: to the Jewish high priests, to God, to Christ, to heavenly beings, to demons.” The Hebrew שָׁחָה (in the Hithpael) as well as the Arabic *sa-ja-da* (سجد) possess the same versatility in meaning as these verbs denote worship of God *and* reverence of men according to their contexts (examples of the latter: Gen. 37:9: the celestial bodies prostrate (מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים) to Joseph; II Kings 2:15: the sons of the prophets bow down (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ-לָוֶ) to Elisha; Q 2:34: the angels bow down (فَسَجَدُوا) to Adam; Q 12:4: the celestial bodies prostrate (سَاجِدِينَ: as an active participle like the Hebrew of Gen 37:9 to Joseph). Thayer defines προσκυνέω as “prostrating one’s self” while Maloney envisions the man born blind kneeling before Christ. Either way, Christian exegetes maintain that the man came to recognize Jesus as God himself, while I contend that the man may have indeed prostrated himself, but it must have been a “prostration of reverence” (سجدة تعظيم), like that of Joseph’s brothers, and not a “prostration of worship” (سجدة تعبد), as this would be unambiguously idolatrous, or rather “Jesus-olatrous” to use Dunn’s word.⁷⁸¹ Although the Johannine evangelist does not employ it, the actual verb denoting cultic worship or rather worship that is only due to God in Greek (LXX), is λατρεύω; it is the translation of the Hebrew עָבַד whose Arabic cognate is عبد. Jesus says in Matthew 4:10 (quoting Deut.

Philadelphia προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου Rv 3:9 (on πρ. ἐνώπιόν τινος cp. Ps 21:28; 85:9; Is 66:23; TestAbr B 4 p. 108, 17 [Stone 64, 17]).—Jesus, who is rendered homage as Messianic king and helper: Mt 2:2, 8, 11.—8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; J 9:38.—Mt 20:20; GJs 20:4 (codd.); 21:1, 2 (codd.). A man possessed by an unclean spirit asks a favor of him Mk 5:6. Mock worship on the part of soldiers 15:19 (στέφανος 1).

⁷⁸⁰ *Lexicon Strong’s Concordance*, no. G4352.

⁷⁸¹ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus*, 147.

10:20): “The Lord your God you will revere and to Him *alone* you will render worship” (Κύριον τὸν Θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις, καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις). The Greek does a fine job of communicating the syntactical nuances and intent of the original Hebrew. In the latter, the objects are fronted for emphasis and prefixed with the direct object marker (תָּהָא). In Matthew’s Greek, however, and reminiscent of the Luther Bible (1522),⁷⁸² the Matthean evangelist understood the second verb (λατρεύσεις) to apply to God alone - hence the addition of μόνῳ, while the previous verb (προσκυνήσεις) lacks this modifier.⁷⁸³ So what exactly did the man born blind do to Jesus? The verb προσκυνέω is made up of *pros* (πρός) and *kyon* (κύων), meaning “toward” and “dog” (כָּלֵב, كلب) respectively. When the Master enters his home, his dog is rejoiced at his coming and licks, or rather kisses, his hands/feet. Jesus, as spiritual Master (مرشد) and Messiah is being revered by the man in the same way that pious scholars and *Ahl al-Bayt* of the Prophet are revered, his hand is kissed. Dunn and Wainwright say respectively: “In no case in the New Testament is there talk of offering cultic worship (*latreuein*) to Jesus;”⁷⁸⁴ “There is no instance of *latreuein* [to do religious service to] which has Christ as its object.”⁷⁸⁵ Even if we imagine that the man prostrated (سجد) to Jesus, his action should be understood within his Jewish context, and thus not dissimilar to the action of Obadiah who “fell on his face” (יִפֹּל עַל-פָּנָיו) (before Elijah) and said: “Is that you *my lord* (LXX: κύριέ μου) Elijah?” Elijah answered: “I am (ἐγώ).”

⁷⁸² Luther added the word “*allein*” (alone) after “faith” in his translation of Rom. 3:28: “For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from (the) works of (the) Law” (λογιζόμεθα γὰρ δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου).

⁷⁸³ The BDAG, 467, says concerning λατρεύω: *serve*, in our lit. only of the carrying out of relig. duties, esp. of a cultic nature, by human beings... Mt 4:10; Lk 4:8 (both Dt 6:13);... indication of the manner in which the service (τῷ Θεῷ) is performed ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει *serve God w. a clear conscience* 2 Ti. 1:3... *serve God acceptably with reverence and awe* Hb. 12:28. (τῷ Θεῷ).

⁷⁸⁴ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus*, 13.

⁷⁸⁵ Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (Eugene: SPCK, 1962), 103.

مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُ اللَّهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَ وَالنُّبُوَّةَ ثُمَّ يَقُولَ لِلنَّاسِ كُونُوا عِبَادًا لِي مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّنَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ

“It is not possible for a human being to whom God gave Revelation, and wisdom, and prophecy, to then say, ‘Be worshippers of me, in addition to God!’ But rather, (he said:) ‘Be lordly! - by means of what you have been teaching of the Bible and by means of what you have been studying’” (Q 3:79).

Chapter Six: From the Good Shepherd to the Entry into Jerusalem (10:1-12:57)

'Isa as the *Via ad Deum*: All Must Follow the Messiah and Enter Through His Door

Chapter 10: (1) "Indeed, I say to you: The one who does not come through the door into the pen of the sheep, but climbs up by another way, he is a thief and a robber. (2) But the one who comes through the door, is the shepherd (master) of the sheep. (3) For *him*, the gatekeeper opens (the door), and the sheep listen to his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (4) Whenever he takes out all of his own sheep, he *walks* in front of them, and the sheep follow him because they know (well) his voice. (5) But a stranger they will never follow, but will run away from him because they don't know the voice of strangers." (6) 'Isa was saying this metaphor, and they had no idea what were the things which he told them.

The Great Concern, Compassion, and Selflessness of 'Isa; Messiah as Model

(7) Then 'Isa said again, "Indeed, I say to you: I am the door of the sheep. (8) All who came before me⁷⁸⁶ were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. (9) I am the door; if *through me*⁷⁸⁷ anyone should enter, (he) will be saved and will enter and leave and will find pasture. (10) The thief does not come except to steal, kill, and destroy. (However) I came so that they might have (eternal) life and have it to its fullest. (11) I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd puts down his life for the sake of the sheep. (12) But the hired hand, not being a shepherd, of whom the sheep are not his own, sees the wolf coming and forsakes the sheep and flees - and the wolf snatches and scatters them. (13) That is because he is a hired hand and does not have real concern for the sheep.⁷⁸⁸ (14) I am the good shepherd and I know my own and my own know me. (15) Just as the Father knows me, and I also know the Father - and I put down my life for the sake of the sheep. (16) But I also have other sheep who are

⁷⁸⁶ This could be a reference to pre-Christic messianic claimants such as Judas of Galilee (Ἰούδας ὁ Γαλιλαῖος [d. c. 6 CE]) mentioned in Acts 5:37. See Josephus' *The Jewish War* 2.433 and *Antiquities* 18.1-10 and 18:23.

⁷⁸⁷ The indirect object "through me" (δι' ἐμοῦ ἐάν τις εἰσέλθῃ) in the dative is fronted for emphasis, hence my translation.

⁷⁸⁸ The true shepherd has great concern for his sheep. This verse is reminiscent of the Qur'an's description of the Prophet Muhammad: "There has come unto you an Apostle from among yourselves ["from the most noble of you" in another reading]; grievous it is to him that you should perish; deeply concerned is he for you; kind and merciful to the believers" (Q 9:128).

not in this pen, and it is necessary for me to bring those; and they will listen to my voice and they will become *one flock, one shepherd*.⁷⁸⁹ (17) For this reason the Father *greatly* loves me (*agapistically*): That I put down my life in order to receive it again.⁷⁹⁰ (18) *No human being can take it from me*, but I put it down willingly. I have permission to put it down and permission to receive it again. I received this order from my Father. (19) Again there was a division among the Jewish authorities because of these words. (20) And many of them said, “He has a devil and is crazy! Why listen to him?” (21) Others said, “These words are not of one possessed by a devil. Is a devil able to open the eyes of the blind?”

Jesus: The Good Shepherd of Israel who will Suffer

There is no other way to God for the Jewish people except through having faith in Jesus as their shepherd. Jesus is “the true and living way” (John 14:6, with the predicates ἡ ἀλήθεια and ἡ ζωὴ as expegetical or explanatory of “the way”). The Johannine theme of the Good Shepherd (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός) is one of the most prominent allusions to the Hebrew Bible in the entire Gospel and was long considered a quintessential messianic title by the Israelites (See: Jer. 23:1-4; Eze. 34:11-12, 23; Micah 2:12-13, etc.). It is the Davidic Good Shepherd (רֹעֶה) who will gather the Jews from Diaspora in a process known as *kibbutz gelyot* and rule over them with justice and righteousness. In the iconic Micah 5:2, we are told:

וְאַתָּה בֵּית־לֶחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה צָעִיר לְהָיוֹת בְּאֶלְפֵי יְהוּדָה מִמָּדָר לִי יֵצֵא לְהָיוֹת מוֹשֵׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וּמוֹצָאֲתוֹ מִקֶּדֶם מִימֵי עוֹלָם

“And you O Bethlehem Ephratah, being small among the thousands of Judah, yet from you, belonging *to Me*, shall come one who will be a Ruler in Israel, whose origin is from antiquity, from ancient times.”

⁷⁸⁹ This is quite poetic in Greek. “Flock” and “shepherd” have the same spelling but with different accents and genders with no conjunction (μία ποίμνη εἰς ποιμήν). Christ has other sheep living in Diaspora who will be reached by the Gospel after the Resurrection via the apostles.

⁷⁹⁰ Christ will lay down his life and receive it again in the Resurrection. This “putting down” of his ψυχή and subsequent reception of it could be an *isharah* pointing to the temporary annihilation (فناء) of one’s ego-self and subsequent reception of it transformed and enlightened (بقاء). Thus the resurrected and “glorified” Christ represents the exalted state of “perpetuity after annihilation,” *al-baqa’ ba’da’l fana’* (البقاء بعد الفناء). Christ’s level of selflessness (إيثار), his willingness to “put down his ψυχή,” is indicated as being comensurate with the Father’s love for him.

The Hebrew for “Ruler” here is מֹשֵׁל (Qal active participle) from the tri-literal root (*m-sh-l*; Arab. مثل), meaning to “make/render like/similar.” This Ruler is the manifestation of a great primordial decree (λόγος) of God who speaks and acts with God’s authority and teaches the Israelites, through his message, how to be “godlike,” “lordly,” “divinized,” רִבְיָיִן (Q 3:79) - *children of God*. In John 10:11, Jesus once again utters the familiar messianic prologue ἐγὼ εἰμί followed by ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός as its predicate; then immediately *repeats* the predicate as the subject of a new clause and completes this clause with a predicative sentence that fronts its direct object for added emphasis - a sentence that many of his Jewish listeners would have found quite baffling - “(I am the good shepherd) *his life* he lays down for the sake of his flock!” (τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τίθησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων). Jesus is apparently going to give his life in order to save others. Thus there is yet another Old Testament allusion imbedded in the text here which I believe that Jesus had in mind when he made this statement.

קָרַב עוֹרֵי עַל־רָעִי וְעַל־גִּבּוֹר עַמִּיתִי נָאֻם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת הֵן אֶת־הַרְעָה וְתַפְוֹצִינָה הַצֹּאן וְהַשְׁבֹּתִי יָדִי עַל־הַצֹּעְרִים:

“O sword, wake up! - Against the man of my fellowship,⁷⁹¹ prophesied the Lord of Hosts, ‘Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered; and I will turn My hand upon the little ones’” (Zech. 13:7).

In Matthew, Jesus is even more explicit, paraphrasing Zechariah 13 when telling his Disciples: ... “For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the shepherd will scatter” (26:31). While most Jewish exegetes interpret the shepherd to be a false prophet of some sort based on the context of Zechariah 13, the context may also suggest that the shepherd is actually in *contrast* to false prophets, and while most take the next statement as destructive (“and I will turn my hand upon the little ones” [שְׁבֹתִי יָדִי עַל]) due

⁷⁹¹ “Man of my fellowship” for גִּבּוֹר עַמִּיתִי. This is Genenius’ translation.

to its usage in other contexts (Amos 1:8; Psalms 81:14), some interpret it as actually protective. One of these exegetes is the *evangelist* himself as we shall see in the latter part of John 10. Thus Zechariah predicts the passion of Christ and the scattering of the Disciples in disarray; all except a remnant, the *Hagioikos* (أهل البيت) of Christ, who shall walk with him to the cross, witness his death, and disseminate the messianic secrets.

Speaking of passion predictions, the evangelist makes several allusions to/quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures that only a person well-versed in the Tanakh will pick up on. For instance, in Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, and just before the iconic John 3:16, he says: "And as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, likewise it is necessary for the Son of Man to be *lifted up*, so that all who believe in him might have eternal life" (John 3:14-15) - an obvious reference to Numbers 21:8-9 where the Israelites were told by Moses to look upon a fiery serpent hanged on a pole (סֵבִי) in order for them to recover from their terminal conditions, *and live*. Also in Isaiah 52:13, God's "servant" (עֶבֶד) is "highly lauded" (Qal Imperf.), *will be* "lifted up" (Niphal Perfect with waw-consecutive [future aspect]), and *will be* "highly exalted" (Qal Perfect with waw-consecutive [future aspect]); (יָרִים וְנִשָּׂא וְנִגְבָּה מְאֹד). The evangelist identifies the servant as Jesus (12:37) while Johannine exegetes struggle with what "lifted up" could mean; either crucifixion, resurrection, or ascension (all three?).⁷⁹² Perhaps Jesus will be "lifted up" upon the cross (as the serpent was upon the pole) and "highly exalted," the latter meaning vindicated by God at his resurrection? The LXX translators rendered the two Hebrew verbs "highly lauded" and "lifted up" as the *single* word ὑψωθήσεται, and "highly exalted" as δοξασθήσεται.

⁷⁹² Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 146. Brown says: "Boismard RB 66 (1959), 378, points out that Jesus may be citing the Targum. The word in both MT and LXX for 'standard-bearing pole' is literally 'sign.' (Could this be one of the factors that led to the Johannine use of 'sign' for the miracles of Jesus?)," 133.

Consider what God tells Christ according to the Qur'an: "O Jesus, indeed I will cause you to die (مُتَوَفِّيكَ), and raise you to Myself (وَرَأْفِكَ), and vindicate⁷⁹³ (وَمُطَهِّرُكَ) you to those who disbelieve" (Q 3:55.1). While *mutawaffika* denotes dying in *every other instance* in the Qur'an as previously mentioned, the next participle, *rafi'uka*, can be taken as either literal (حقيقي) as in Q 2:93 (Sinai), or metaphorical (مجازي) as in Q 94:4 (Muhammad's repute), or both as in Q 19:57 (about Enoch's repute and ascension). Jesus has his life seized by God who raises his repute (ذَكَرَ) as well as his soul (رُوحَ), and is then vindicated by his resurrection: ὑψωθήσεται and δοξασθήσεται. But the pivotal question is: Does this servant of Isaiah 52 and 53 have anything to do with the Messiah? In the latter chapter, we are told that the servant is "smitten and afflicted" and "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities." Most Jewish exegetes interpret the servant to be the personified Israel, but according to M. Brown, although this "national interpretation" can be traced back as far as Origen,⁷⁹⁴ it did not gain prominence and consistency until the time of Rashi, ben Ezra, and Radak among *Jewish* exegetes.⁷⁹⁵ In John 12:38, the evangelist quotes directly from Isaiah 53:1 (LXX) with reference to Jesus: "O Lord! Who has believed our message? And the arm of the Lord has been revealed to whom" (κύριε τίς ἐπίστευσεν τῇ ἀκοῇ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ βραχίον κυρίου τίνι ἀπεκαλύφθη)? In other words, Jesus is the Messiah as well as the Suffering Servant; and although a suffering and dying Messiah was not the expectation of many, hence the

⁷⁹³ Lit. "purge/purify from." Classical commentators take this to mean Jesus' physical extraction from the infidelitous Israelites. However, if we take مُتَوَفِّيكَ as an indication of Jesus' death, the *apparent* failure of Jesus' messianic mission in the eyes of his opponents is repudiated by his resurrection thus "purifying" Christ from the false charges of his enemies who "disbelieved." Christ is vindicated by God as the true Messiah by "his raising" of him from the dead and unto Him in the Ascension.

⁷⁹⁴ Michael L. Brown, "Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53," in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Darrell L. Brock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 64; cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.55.

⁷⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 64-73.

statement in John 12:34 (“We heard from the Torah that the Messiah remains forever, so how can you say that it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up?”), it was not unheard of. In fact, most Orthodox Jews today believe in *two* Messiahs: *HaMashiakh ben Yosef* (The Messiah son of Joseph) and *HaMashiakh ben David* (The Messiah son of David); (apparently) the former suffers and dies while the latter resurrects him. Evidence of the tradition of two Messiahs surface as early as the Qumran documents among the Essene community. Jesus, however, is the *only* Messiah, but with two *aspects*; *ben Joseph* in his first coming (and literally called “son of Joseph” [υἱὸν τοῦ Ἰωσήφ] or “Son of Man”) and *ben David* at his *Parousia*. These are his “Meccan/*Jamali*” and “Medinan/*Jalali*” phases. Interestingly, even the great Maimonides (Rambam) considers Isaiah 53 to be a reference to the Messiah in his *Epistle to Yemen* (*Iggeret Teman*, אגרת תימן) originally written in Arabic (الرسالة اليمنية).⁷⁹⁶

While many contemporary Jewish polemicists completely repudiate the notion that the Messiah is Isaiah’s suffering servant, Driver and Neubauer mention several Talmudic *midrashim* that explicitly identify Isaiah 52:13-14, 53:1-12 with the Messiah. For instance, the Rabbis said in *Rabbah Ruth* that when Boaz tells Ruth to dip her bread into the vinegar (Ruth 2:14) this refers to “chastisements” of “King Messiah,” for it says, “he was wounded for our transgressions. bruised for our iniquities”⁷⁹⁷ (quoting Isaiah 53).

⁷⁹⁶ See: Brown, “Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Brock and Glaser, 63, citing Douglas Pyle, comp., *What the Rabbonim Say about Moshiach* (n.p.: Douglas H. Pyle, 2008), 57-58, citing Abraham S. Halkin, *Moses Maimonides’ Epistle to Yemen*, ed. From MSS; Eng. trans. Boaz Cohen (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952), 8.

⁷⁹⁷ Samuel R. Driver and Adolph Neubauer, *The Suffering Servant of Isaiah Acc. to the Jewish Interpreters* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 199), 9. For a brief survey of traditional Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53 see: Brown, “Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Brock and Glaser, 61-86. Also see: Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), chapter four: “The Suffering Christ as a Midrash on Daniel.” Boyarin, a Masorti Rabbi, argues that the notion of a

In John 13:26 & 19:29 respectively, the eating of “dipped bread” and drinking of “vinegar” begins and ends Jesus’ passion; *Yalqut* (*Yalkut Shimoni*): In Zechariah 4:7, the “great mountain” (הַר־הַגָּדוֹל) is “King Messiah,” because he is “greater than the patriarchs, and it is said, ‘My servant shall be high, lifted up, and lofty exceedingly’”⁷⁹⁸ (quoting Isaiah 52:13); and of course Jesus said: ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμὶ; *Siphre*: “King Messiah who endures affliction and pains for the transgressors. And this is what is meant when it is said, ‘And the Lord made the iniquity of us all meet upon him’”⁷⁹⁹ (quoting Isaiah 53:6); *P’siqtha* (attributed to “Moses the Preacher”): “The Holy One brought forth the soul of the Messiah, and said to him, ‘Art thou willing to be created and to redeem my sons after 6,000 years?’ He replied, ‘I am.’ God replied, ‘If so, thou must take upon thyself chastisements in order to wipe away their iniquity, as it is written, ‘Surely our sicknesses he hath carried’”⁸⁰⁰ (quoting Isaiah 53:4). Here is the entire chapter of Isaiah 53:

Isaiah 53: The Suffering Servant

v.1: Who will believe our message (שְׂמוּעָה)? The majesty (זָרָעַ) of the Lord will be revealed to *whom*?

v.2: He will grow up as a twig before Him and as a root from dry stubble; he will not have an attractive *outward* form nor will he be ornamented (with fanciness), and when we see him, there will be no *apparent* reason (why) we will desire or praise him.

v.3: He is despised and rejected by men; a man of pains and sorrows, acquainted with grief; it is almost as if we will hide our faces from him; despised - so we will not value him (as anything).

v.4: Indeed our sicknesses he will carry; our pains and sorrows he will bear, yet we will not value him (as anything); stricken, wounded by God, and highly afflicted.

v.5: He will be wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; he will be chastised in order for us to have peace (שָׁלוֹם), and it is by his bruises and stripes that we will be healed.

suffering messiah finds its origins in Palestine among Jesus’ initial audiences, and not something that was introduced later due to Hellenistic or Pagan influences.

⁷⁹⁸ Driver and Neubauer, *The Suffering Servant of Isaiah Acc. to the Jewish Interpreters*, 9.

⁷⁹⁹ *ibid*, 10-11.

⁸⁰⁰ *ibid*, 11.

v.6: All of us, like sheep, will go astray; we will turn, each one of us, to his own way (דָּרָךְ); the Lord will use him *to intercede for the sin of all of us*.
 v.7: He will be oppressed and afflicted, but he will not complain; as a lamb to slaughter, he will be brought; as a sheep before its shearers bound and silent, he will not complain.
 v.8: By oppressive means and (poor) judgment he will be taken (away); But who will protest from his generation? For he will be cut off from the land of the living; for the rebellion on my people he will be stricken.
 v.9: And he will make his grave with the wicked and the rich in his death, even though he will do no violence (חָמָס) nor speak treacherously (מִרְמָה).
 v.10: Yet it will please the Lord to bruise him (it is His will) and cause him grief; and when He makes his soul a sin offering (זֶחֶם), he will see offspring and (He) will extend his life, and the pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand.
 v.11: He will understand the (reason for the) difficult work of his soul and be satisfied; and by his knowledge (teaching) my righteous servant (צַדִּיק עֲבָדִי) will make many more righteous (יִצְדִּיק); and he will bear their iniquities.
 v.12: Thus I will divide for him a portion with the great (ones); and he will divide spoils with the strong (ones) because he will expose his soul to death; he will be numbered among the transgressors; he will carry the sin of many; he will *intercede* (יִפְגֵּעַ) for the transgressors.

By reliable account, Jesus, the son of Mary, had a patchwork cloak, which he wore when he ascended into heaven. One of the masters of the Path once said that he had seen him in a dream, wearing that same old patchy woolen cloak, and that beams of light shone from every patch. He explained, "I cried, 'O Christ, how come these beams of light from your dress?' And he replied, 'These are the rays of my misery. Every rip and tear which I had to mend, the Good Lord turned to light, representing all the pangs of suffering which have stung my heart.'"
 -Hojwiri, *Kashf al-mahjub* p.56.⁸⁰¹

Jesus is the Suffering Servant, and there is redemptive value to his suffering. The transgressions of the children of Israel were laid upon him and he went willingly and selflessly to his death in order to save the nation of Israel from immediate annihilation by the Romans and to give the Jews living in Diaspora an opportunity to hear and believe in the Gospel - He was "chastised" in order for Israel to have peace (שָׁלוֹם). He was executed by the state even though he was non-violent and did not have any political aspirations. Ibn 'Ajibah says: "As for the one who bears injuries (الضراء) and prefers others to himself, he is said to possess the virtue of altruism (إيثار). For the generality, generosity

⁸⁰¹ Quoted from Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 92.

means to give of their possessions; for the elect, it is to give of *themselves* (نفوس); and for the elect of the elect, it is to yield their spirits to death (موت) in spiritual combat (مجاهدة) that they might be brought back to eternal life (الحياة الأبدية) in contemplative vision (مشاهدة).⁸⁰² God made him a “trespass offering” (עֹשֶׂת), yet he will see his spiritual children, his Holy House (*Hagioikos*), when he is raised from the dead, and his life is “prolonged” (until the eschaton). Through his teaching and selfless example, this righteous servant (עֶבֶד, عبد) will be the means by which many others will attain righteousness, to make them beloved “children”/saints of God (اولياء الله). His *intercession* (شفاعة) with God postponed the wrath of God for nearly forty years until the Temple was destroyed by Titus, thus marking the end of the messianically-earned and divinely-granted grace period. *Only* in this figurative sense does Christ “die for the sins of many;” there is no vicarious atonement. Everyone is still held accountable to God for their own sins; the work of Christ simply delayed the punishment of God and made possible his resurrection so that his followers, being extensions of him, would become manifest (ظاهرين) in the Jewish world in order to evangelize it, with God’s “help” - “Jesus the son of Mary said to the Disciples: ‘Who will be my helpers (when I go) to God?’ The disciples said: ‘We are God’s helpers!’ Then a party of the Israelites believed and a party disbelieved, *but We helped those who believed over their enemies and they became manifest!*” (قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ لِلْحَوَارِيِّينَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ فَأَمَّا نَتِ طَائِفَةٌ) *manifest!*” (قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ لِلْحَوَارِيِّينَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ فَأَمَّا نَتِ طَائِفَةٌ)⁸⁰³ This verse has nothing to do with Trinitarian Christianity prevailing in the Roman Empire, but rather

⁸⁰² Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 26.

⁸⁰³ Q 61:14.9

refers to the missions of the Disciples of Jesus in the ancient Near-East; it refers to them becoming manifest and their making manifest the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ayoub's "House of Sorrows"

Ayoub says in his book *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*: "Redemption may be seen as direct intercession or direct example. In the second case, it redeems, so to speak, the community and its ideal by continuing to provide a living example of self-sacrifice."⁸⁰⁴ Speaking within the context of Imam Husayn's martyrdom narrative (مقاتل), Ayoub says that through his death, "the wronged martyr" became a "paradigm of selfless sacrifice, the measure of truth and falsehood, and the intercessor on the Day of Judgment for his followers".⁸⁰⁵ Although Ayoub is speaking from the perspective of Shiite pietism and martyrology, Sunnite scholars will certainly agree with his assertion that the world (دنیا) for the truly pious is the "House of Sorrows" (بيت الاحزان).⁸⁰⁶ The Prophet himself is described in Tirmidhi's *Shamma'il* as "continuously sorrowful" (متواصل الاحزان).⁸⁰⁷ According to a well-known *hadith*, the Prophet said: "The greatness of the reward (of the man of faith) is proportionate with the greatness of his afflictions. *For, if God loves a people, He visits them with afflictions* (إذا أحب الله قوما ابتلاهم). He who is content (that is, with God's will), with him will God be pleased, and he who is wrathful, divine wrath will he have."⁸⁰⁸ Sunnite historians bear witness to the fact that part and parcel to Umayyad policies were the hunting down and killing of the Prophet's descendants as well as their

⁸⁰⁴ Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 19.

⁸⁰⁵ *ibid*, 15.

⁸⁰⁶ *ibid*, 24.

⁸⁰⁷ *Hadith* of Ibn Abi Dunya.

⁸⁰⁸ Quoted in Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 26; cf. *Hadith* of Ahmad.

cursing (لعن) from the pulpits of Damascus. In some cases, dead bodies were mutilated to further humiliate the Prophetic House. The body of the great great grandson of the Prophet, Zaid b. ‘Ali (d.), for instance, was exhumed by order of an Umayyad governor, decapitated, then hanged on the gallows. Thus he is known among Sunnite/Shiite scholars as the “Crucified of the House of Muhammad” (صليب ال محمد). Just as suffering and affliction was the way of the Holy House of Muhammad (أهل بيت محمد), it was previously the way of the Holy House of Christ, and despite the rampant attitude of “Sunnite triumphalism,” the great Companion and origin of the Hanafite school ‘Abdullah b. Mas’ud maintains that even the Prophet Muhammad himself was murdered by poisoning.⁸⁰⁹ The death of Imam Husayn, in particular, had a great *purpose*; it roused the consciousness of a slumbering *ummah* who had given their consent to corrupt and tyrannical leaders. While the Qur’an says (Q 35:18.1): “No burdened person will carry the burden of another” (وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى), the *mufasssirin* explain that this is only true with respect to the *afterlife* (الآخرة), not the world (دنيا). Thus an illegitimate child who is harassed by his peers is, in effect, being punished for the sins of his parents, while there is no taint upon his soul. It was pleasing to God to “lay the sins” of the *ummah* upon Husayn, who was smitten and afflicted by God in order to shock the *ummah* out of its complacencies, check their souls, and repent in earnestness to Him while adopting Husayn as their paragon of virtue, so that they might have peace (سلام) with God. Husayn’s sacrifice taught the *ummah* that being a *salih* (صالح [act. part. form I]) was not good enough, one must strive toward becoming a *muslih* (مصلح [act. part. form IV]). One must not, in other words, only seek to be righteous for oneself, but must engage with the

⁸⁰⁹ al-Zarqani, *Sharh Mawahib Laduniyyah*. Tertullian famously said: “The blood of the martyr is the seed of the Church” (*Apologetics*, 50).

broader community and seek to provide ways of rectifying and raising up the human condition. This may involve opposing the status quo and putting oneself in danger for the sake of others. The Umayyad authorities, not realizing the significance of what they were doing because “the event was made dubious to them” ([Q 4:157.5] *شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ*), *thought* they had conclusively killed the *spirit* of Husayn on that day in Karbala,’ but “certainly they did not kill him (it)” ([Q 4:157.9] *وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا*). Modern Shiite exegete, al-Tabataba’i (d. 1402/1981), even sees in the Qur’anic *Aqaydah* story a Husayni typology; the son of Abraham was “ransomed” by a “mighty victim” (*بِذَبْحٍ عَظِيمٍ*): a *paradisiacal* ram foreshadowing the sacrifice of Husayn.⁸¹⁰ According to a Shiite tradition mentioned by Ayoub, the language of which hauntingly resembling Isaiah 53, even Adam was informed of Husayn’s martyrdom:

“Your son Husayn will be afflicted with a calamity (*musibah*) beside which all calamities will appear insignificant. He shall be killed thirsty, a stranger and one utterly abandoned, having no supporter or help. If only you could see him when he will cry out O Adam, ‘O my thirst, O my abandonment!’, then thirst will stand between him like a veil of smoke. His cries will be answered only by strikes of the sword and the cup of death. Then will he be slain like a *lamb*, from the back of the neck, and his enemies will pillage his goods. His head and those of his supporters will be paraded in the land, and with them his womenfolk carried captives. All this has pre-existed in the omniscience of the One, the All Giver (*mannan*).”⁸¹¹

Jesus Christ was Crucified

“So peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am resurrected!”

وسلام علي يوم ولدت ويوم أموت ويوم أبعث حيا (19:33 Q)

The most popular theory in Islam’s exegetical tradition as to what actually happened to Jesus at the end of his ministry is that he was somehow substituted and saved

⁸¹⁰ al-Tabataba’i, *al-Mizan*, Q 37:107.

⁸¹¹ Quoted from Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 28.

from the cross.⁸¹² Many scholars have attempted to identify the source of this popular substitution theory. Perhaps it was the position of the early/proto-Shiites (Massignon), the forerunners of the Twelvers (إثنا عشرية), that was eventually adopted by Sunnite orthodoxy, who deemed it unbecoming of a prophet to be killed by his *Jewish* enemies. However, Sunnite readers today would be horrified to realize that the source of the proto-Shiite's "literal Docetism" with respect to the Crucifixion seems to have been their belief that the physicality of Imam Husayn was cast upon a devoted follower of his named Hanzalah b. S'ad while his torture and murder were actually experienced by another: the (Sunnite beloved) second Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattab post-mortem! Even more interesting is the fact that the *earliest extant exegesis* of Q 4:157 written by *anyone* was that of the famous Christian monk John Damascene (d. 749); and it is Damascene who interprets the *ayah* as denying the Crucifixion of Jesus thus associating "literal Docetism" with the Qur'an,⁸¹³ perhaps to further distance the sect of the "Hagarenes" from his "authentic" Christianity. Although there are traditions attributed to Ibn 'Abbas and Wahb b. Munabbih which support the substitution theory, the former's *tafsir*, *Tanwir al-Miqbas*, has "many questions of authenticity"⁸¹⁴ while the latter figure is often deemed as an "audacious liar."⁸¹⁵ Lawson suggests that it was the interpretation of John Damascene that came to influence the early, "pre-Tabari" Sunni *mufassirin* who almost all uniformly endorse the substitution theory of the Cross.⁸¹⁶ Lawson also points out that while the "classical and medieval period (923-1505)" saw the development of sophisticated

⁸¹² Cf. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-'Azim*, Q 4:157; al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan*, Q 4:157; al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, Q 4:157.

⁸¹³ Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 20-21.

⁸¹⁴ *ibid*, 45.

⁸¹⁵ *ibid*, 50.

⁸¹⁶ *ibid*, 43-67.

syntactical exegesis of Q 4:157 and a trend of problematizing the “standard” substitution theory, such as the *tafasir* of al-Razi (d. 605/1209) and al-Zamakhshari (d. 537/1143), this trend abruptly came to end in the modern period with Sunnite exegetes utilizing the highly-problematic *Gospel of Barnabas*,⁸¹⁷ such as Rida (d. 1354/1935), Qutb (d. 1386/1966), and al-Sabuni (b. 1930 CE)⁸¹⁸ due to its endorsement of the “Judas theory.”⁸¹⁹ Other modern Sunnite authorities, deciding to ignore *Barnabas* probably due to its calling Muhammad the Messiah (!), opted rather for the “Swoon Theory” (Sayyid Ahmad Khan, d. 1316/1898) or “Barabbas Theory” (Mawdudi, d. 1399/1979). After American Muslim biblicist Jerald Dirks takes his readers on a whirlwind tour of the canonical Gospels, the Gospel of Barnabas, the Two Books of Jeu, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, he concludes by listing possible

⁸¹⁷ The vast majority of Muslim biblicists and scholars of comparative religion have deemed the so-called Gospel of Barnabas as pseudepigraphical, probably a pious fraud, that was written for polemical reasons and dubiously attributed to the apostle Barnabas, the traveling companion of Paul according to the Book of Acts in the New Testament. From the standpoint of textual criticism, there is no extant manuscript of Barnabas that predates the sixteenth century of the common era (CE); while the oldest extant manuscript dating from this period was written in Italian. The entire Italian manuscript was translated into English by Lonsdale and Laura Ragg in 1907 along with a lengthy introduction. Although much of what is written in the gospel agrees with Islamic theology/Christology, such as the presence of many clear predictions of the Prophet Muhammad as well as several denials of Christ’s divine literal sonship and deity, there are also several problems with the gospel. First of all, the gospel denies the messiahship of Jesus Christ thus putting itself into clear conflict with the Qur’an, a definitive proof-text; there are also many anachronisms found within the gospel which suggests a much later date of composition; such as the gospel’s claim that Jesus was born during the rule of the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate or the reference to an annual “forty day fast,” – an apparent reference to Lent, a practice not attested before the fourth century CE. That being said, we know that there was indeed a Gospel of Barnabas (*Evangelium Barnabe*) that was in circulation among Christian communities in the fifth and sixth centuries CE which prompted Pope Gelasius I to issue the *Decretum Gelasianum* listing the gospel as apocryphal (spurious). We do not know what this gospel actually contained, only that it was deemed heresy by the decree of papal authority. Many Muslim scholars erroneously conflate the Gospel of Barnabas with the Epistle of Barnabas; the latter is found in the oldest complete Greek manuscript of the New Testament on earth, the Codex Sinaiticus (circa 375 CE). The Epistle of Barnabas is completely different than the so-called Gospel of Barnabas of the sixteenth century CE Italian manuscript. Therefore, serious academic inquiry into the gospel reveals that Muslims should approach it with extreme caution as it certainly appears to be of very dubious origins. Cf. Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas* (Cosimo: 2010 edition).

⁸¹⁸ al-Sabuni, *Al-Nabuwwa wa'l Anbiya*, trans. by Muhammad Idris Esau under the title *Prophethood and the Prophets*, 208.

⁸¹⁹ See: Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, 43-67.

candidates for substitution: “Judas Iscariot; Simon of Cyrene; simulacrums of Jesus Christ; unidentified others; and a paramilitary insurrectionist known as Jesus, the Galilean, who claimed to be the King of the Jews, and who is to be distinguished from Jesus, the son of the Father, i.e., Jesus Christ”⁸²⁰ - Because “the Qur’an clearly states that Jesus Christ was not crucified.”⁸²¹ Thus *some sort* of substitution is mandatory. However, what is apparently “clearly stated” in the Qur’an regarding the Crucifixion has been the object of much scholarly debate among Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals,⁸²² yet this discussion as well as even a hint of linguistic engagement is summarily missing from Dirks’ analysis.

A notable exception to the above was al-Ghazali whose *al-Radd al-Jamil* accepts the historicity of the Crucifixion, due to his textually-affirming approach to the New Testament.⁸²³ Lawson mentions Massignon’s conclusion that perhaps Ghazali’s contact with Isma’ilite elements, which Ghazali refers to as *al-Batiniyya*, convinced him of the Crucifixion’s historical reality (although he remained generally unconvinced about their principal mystical teachings).⁸²⁴ In fact, Ghazali tells us that when Mansur b. al-Hallaj (d. 309/922) was being crucified for blasphemy, the latter enigmatically commented, “They did not kill nor did they crucify him, but it only appeared so to them” ([Q 4:157.5] وَمَا

⁸²⁰ Jerald F. Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent* (Beltsville: Amana, 2001), 111.

⁸²¹ *ibid.*

⁸²² For example, the brilliant Imam al-Razi finds it unacceptable that God would cast the likeness of Jesus upon another person since we rely on our senses when giving eyewitness testimony in order to establish justice (*Maʿfatih*, Q 4:157).

⁸²³ I feel that at this point I should provide you with references that discuss the authenticity of *al-Radd al-Jamil*. Here is a valuable note from Lawson (p. 77, no. 24): “Thus Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazali* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975), pp. 458-87, disagrees with Massignon’s acceptance of its authenticity. The topic was recently broached in G.S. Reynolds, ‘The Ends of *al-Radd al-Jamil* and Its Portrayal of Christian Sects,’ *Islamochristiana*, 25, 1999, pp. 45-65, who rejects al-Ghazali’s authorship, and Maha El-Kaisy Friemuth, ‘AL-Radd al-Jamil: al-Ghazali’s or Pseudo-Ghazali’s?,’ in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007), pp. 275-94, who is more optimistic.”

⁸²⁴ Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, 78.

﴿قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلْبُوهُ وَلَٰكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ﴾!⁸²⁵ In other words, the Baghdadi authorities cannot kill the *spirit* and *reality* of the great Sufi; while his body was put to death, his immortal element (*khulud*) remains forever. Al-Hallaj further chanted “Kill me O my friends! For in my death is my life!” (اقتلوني يا ثقاتي، فإن قتلتي حياتي). This “figurative Docetism” is described by Corbin: “Christ did not die on the cross; God raised him unto Himself, for men did not have the power to kill the Word of God (*Kalam Allah*), the Spirit of God (*Ruh Allah*). But men had the illusion that they killed him.”⁸²⁶ In another *tafsir* attributed to the spiritual Master and most honorable teacher of both Abu Hanifa (d. 150/767) and Malik b. Anas (d. 179/796), Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765), the great teacher intimated that, in the summarizing words of Lawson, “he (Jesus) gained a high rank (*rif’a*) by being killed, just as God raised his other prophets (*wa-lahu fi qatlihi rif’a kama rafa’a Allah anbiya’ahu*). God seated ‘him’ (Jesus) on the throne of intimacy (*uns*) and reunion (*liqa’*). The paradox - reading the *wa* in the previous phrase as ‘while’ rather than ‘and’ - of appearing to be nailed to a cross in humiliation but in reality being seated on a throne is thus indicated.”⁸²⁷ Therefore, only a Sufi reading of the text reveals the truth of the Crucifixion. In fact, *the very ayah itself is docetic*; appearing to say one thing (that Christ was not crucified) but actually meaning another (they did not kill him in *reality*). In fact, the entire scene is docetic; Ashton mentions that for John, the “barbarous punishment” of Jesus is viewed “as a glory” rather than what it *seems*, “a disgrace,”⁸²⁸ and that the “cross

⁸²⁵ Q 4:157. This is quoted from Lawson who cites Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *al-Mustazhiri*, in Ignaz Goldziher, *Streitschrift des Gazali gegen die Batinijja-Sekte* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1916), p. 30, 1.8 ff.

⁸²⁶ Quoted from Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an*, 4. Cf. Henry Corbin, ‘L’Ismaélisme et le symbole de la Croix,’ *La Table Ronde*, 120, 1957, 122-34.

⁸²⁷ *ibid*, 56-58. The original source cited by Lawson is Paul Mwyia, ‘Le tafsir mystique attribue a Ga’far Sadiq,’ *Melanges de l’Université Saint Joseph*, 43(4), 1968, pp. 182-230..

⁸²⁸ John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 492.

itself is an instrument of exaltation,”⁸²⁹ since it brings, according to Larrson, “Jesus to a higher position.”⁸³⁰ In Q 4:157.9-158.1, the verb *qa-ta-la*, usually meaning “to kill” is placed in juxtaposition with *ra-fa-’a*, usually meaning “to raise,” because they are opposite in meaning, with *qatalu* (قتلوا) being repudiated by the particle of correction *bal* (بل), meaning “rather.” Thus the opposite of *qatala* is “to raise” *to life*; if we take *rafa’a* as being “exalted in station” then its opposite, *qatala*, means to be “debased, humiliated.” Jesus was either killed *and* resurrected *or* not debased *and* glorified; *or he was killed but not debased, resurrected and glorified (doxafied)*. Thus the reader of the Qur’an is being invited to look beyond the superficial outward appearance of things and actualize deeper realities - μη κρίνετε κατ’ ὄψιν ἀλλὰ τὴν δικαίαν κρίσιν κρίνετε. Perhaps these things were intimated by the great Origen who criticized those who merely saw the literalness of “Christ crucified,” calling their simplistic conclusions doctrines “only fit for children.”⁸³¹

Returning to John 10, we read that Jesus said: “For this reason the Father greatly (*agapistically*) loves me: That I put down my life in order that I might receive it again. *No human being can take it from me*, (οὐδεὶς αἶρει αὐτὴν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ) but I put it down willingly. I have permission to put it down and permission to receive it again. I received this order from my Father” (John 10:17-18). No human being can take away the life of the Messiah, but only God who preordained his death according to His well-pleasing Will before the creation of the world. It was God who seized the soul of His Messiah from the cross, not allowing him to expire due to injuries inflicted upon him by the Jewish

⁸²⁹ *ibid*, 486.

⁸³⁰ Tord Larrson, “Glory or Persecution: The God of the Gospel of John in the History of Interpretation” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 83.

⁸³¹ This is quoted from Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*, 64-65. However, Harpur does not give a source and I could not locate it.

authorities.⁸³² Three days later, God returned the Messiah's soul to his body to vindicate him in the eyes of his enemies. Al-Tabataba'i says something close to this is his exegesis *Al-Mizan* in which he gives a possible *ta'wil* of the *ayah* as not killing Jesus in "the usual ('*adiyan*) way."⁸³³ Lawson says, "The meaning is that Jesus did not die by 'their' hands, but rather appeared so to them (*bal shubbiha lahum amruhu*)."⁸³⁴ Al-Zamakhshari, the Arabic Master, contends that the subject of the passive verb *shubbiha* is the impersonal pronoun "it," meaning the affair or event of the Crucifixion was made dubious or

⁸³² While it is true that the Romans were the ones who *literally* chastised and executed Jesus, it is clear that John presents the Jewish authorities as the true enemies of Christ. Pilate declared to the crowd shouting for Jesus' blood: "I find in him no fault at all" (Εγὼ οὐδεμίαν αἰτίαν εὐρίσκω ἐν αὐτῷ [John 18:38.9]); "Look! I am bringing him outside to you so that you know that I find in him no fault at all" (Ἴδε ἄγω ὑμῖναὐτὸν ἔξω ἵνα γνῶτε ὅτι οὐδεμίαν αἰτίαν εὐρίσκω ἐν αὐτῷ [John 19:4.9]); "I do not find fault in him" (οὐχ εὐρίσκω ἐν αὐτῷ αἰτίαν [John 19:6.9]). In John 19:12.1, we are told: "From then on, Pilate was trying to release him" (ἐκ τούτου ὁ Πιλάτος ἐζήτει ἀπολῦσαι αὐτόν). Jesus clearly does not have a political agenda and Pilate realizes that. Jesus sets Pilate's mind at ease by declaring, "the one who handed me over to you (the authorities) has the greater sin" (John 19:11), thus placing the majority of the blame for his capture squarely upon the Jews, not Pilate (the Romans). Jesus is not seditious, but condemns his fellow Jews. Therefore it seems that Pilate wants to release him because Jewish disunity and strife take the focus off of their Pagan colonizers. The Jewish authorities, however, try a new tactic: they make the crime *explicitly* political; Jesus made himself into "the Son of Allah," which carries with it a political claim as the "King" of Israel (the Messiah). Because of this, Pilate sees an opportunity to send a strong message but also to perhaps save himself from Caesar's reprimand. He then presents Jesus as the "King of the Jews" in order to create discord among the Jews, while knowing full well that Jesus has no political aspirations, but that he can exploit this situation in order to keep the Jews at *each other's* throats. Also, it will serve as a lesson for future messianic claimants that Rome can execute Jewish "kings." Pilate then wrote "King of the Jews" above the cross to humiliate the Jews and hopefully, in his mind, discourage future rebellion. It was written in 1) Hebrew (the sacred language of Jewish scripture and synagogue liturgy); 2) Latin (the official language of the Roman Empire); 3) Greek (the *lingua franca* of the Romans in the ancient Near-East). Pilate's aim here is to send a strong message to all Jews living in Roman provinces: Do not rebel, or your rebellion will be crushed and your nation humiliated! - All the while Pilate knowing that the "Jesus movement" would not act seditiously because Jesus did not have political aspirations; Jesus sounded more like a "goofy Sufi" (intoxicated Sufi) from Pilate's perspective. Therefore Pilate and the Romans were not totally innocent. While this perspective may not be politically correct nowadays, we must strive to be as true to John as possible. We must remember that Jesus, his Disciples, and most of his followers were Jewish as well, thus essentializing the enemies of Christ as "Jews" is nonsensical. Unfortunately, Christian elements throughout history have used the Gospel of John as a tool for the demonization and persecution of Jewry whom they have often dubbed "Christ-killers." For a comprehensive treatment of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Gospel of John see: Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 9-10, 75-83. Interestingly, Reinhartz is of the opinion that *hoi Ioudaioi* should be translated as "the Jews" and not "religious authorities" or "Judahites" in order to expose the violence of the text. See: Adele Reinhartz, "Jews' and Jews in the Fourth Gospel," in Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, 356.

⁸³³ Quoted from Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an*, 140; cf. al-Tabataba'i, *al-Mizan*, Q 4:157.

⁸³⁴ *ibid.*

obscure, not Jesus.⁸³⁵ Lane supports this usage of the passive voice by citing the example of شُبِّهَ عَلَيْهِ and defining it as “he rendered it ambiguous, dubious, or obscure, to him.”⁸³⁶ Thus the *ayah* reads: “They did not kill him, nor crucify him, but it (the cross event) was made dubious to them.” In other words, the Jewish authorities thought that they had killed Jesus directly, not realizing that God that seized his soul, and additionally, they did not understand that it was the destiny of the Messiah to die due to their misunderstanding of the Scriptures. As stated earlier, Jesus’ lineage goes back to David and Aaron, both through his mother Mary. Thus he is both King and Priest “upon the order of Melchizedek” ([Psalm 110:4.9] (עַל־דְּבָרָתִי מֶלְכִי־צֶדֶק)). As King, he possesses a spiritual (and eventual physical) kingdom, and as Priest, he offers up a sacrifice.

'Isa Clarifies that He is One with Allah on the Level of Will, Purpose, and Intention

(22) At that time the Festival of Dedication (Hanukkah) took place in Jerusalem - it was winter (23) And 'Isa was *walking* in the Temple, in Solomon’s Porch. (24) The Jewish authorities encircled him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are al-Masih, tell us clearly!” (25) 'Isa answered them, “*I told you (already)* but you do not believe. The works which I do in the Name of my Father bear witness about me, (26) but you don’t believe, because you are not from my sheep. (27) My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, (28) and I give them eternal life, they will never ever be destroyed, and no one will snatch them from my hand. (29) What my Father has given me is greater than all, and no one can snatch (them) from the hand of the Father. (30) *I and the Father are one.*

(31) Again the Jewish authorities picked up stones to stone him. (32) 'Isa answered them, “Many good works have I shown to you from the Father, for which of those works are you stoning me?” (33) The Jewish authorities answered him, “For a good work we are not stoning you, but for blasphemy, because you being a man, make yourself a god (or *God* [Allah]).” (34) 'Isa answered them, “Isn’t it written in your Torah, ‘I said: You are gods?’ (35) If He called those ‘gods’ to whom the word of Allah came, and the Scripture cannot be ignored, (36) then can you say to the one whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You blaspheme,’ because I said I am the Son of Allah? (37) If I don’t do the works of my Father, then *don’t* believe me! (38) But if I do them, then don’t believe me, believe the works, so that you know and understand that in me is the Father, and

⁸³⁵ ibid, 102. Cf. al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, 4:157.

⁸³⁶ Lane, 1499.

I am in the Father.” (39) Therefore, they were seeking again to arrest him but he escaped from their hand.

(40) And 'Isa went again across the Jordan to the place where Yahya had been baptizing earlier and remained there. (41) And many came to him and said, “Yahya did no miracle, but all things which Yahya said about this man were true.” (42) So many believed in him there.

Obstinacy of Jewish Authorities

After just admitting that he was the Good Shepherd, an unambiguously messianic title, the Jewish authorities surround Jesus while he was “walking” (teaching the path) on Solomon’s Porch and ironically demand him to make a messianic claim without ambiguity or circumlocution (παρησίᾳ). However, the authorities issue their demand by seemingly mocking what Jesus had just revealed to them about the Good Shepherd “laying down his *life*” (τὴν ψυχὴν) and that “no human being can *take it*” (αἴρει αὐτὴν) from him” when they say (literally): “Until when will you *take (raise) our life*” ... (ἕως πότε τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν αἴρεις [10:24.9]), with biting sarcasm and obstinacy. Thus I do not consider the authorities’ question to be sincere or genuine; they are once again trying to instigate the crowd against Jesus by provoking him to say something controversial. The authorities’ sarcastic attitude is even intimated in the Qur’an when they said: “We killed ‘the Messiah,’ Jesus the son of Mary, ‘the Sent One of God!’” (Q 4:157.1) Notice that I put the words “the Messiah” and as well as “the Sent One of God” in quotes because the authorities are simply ridiculing the titles that Jesus gave to himself and will therefore be met with Divine wrath because of this (their) *utterance* (وَقَوْلِهِمْ). Al-Zamakhshari cites Q 26:27 where the Pharaoh ridicules Moses in much the same way: “Indeed your ‘Messenger’ who was (apparently) sent to you, is insane!”⁸³⁷ If the authorities truly believed in these titles then they would not have boasted about killing him. If they truly

⁸³⁷ Quoted from Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an*, 101;.cf. al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, Q 4:157.

believed that Jesus was the “King of the Jews,” an unmistakable messianic title, then they would not have requested Pilate to change the τίτλος above the cross from “King of the Jews” (Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ) to “He *claimed*, ‘I am the King of the Jews’” (ΕΚΕΙΝΟΣ ΕΙΠΕΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΕΙΜΙ ΤΩΝ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ). Interestingly, the evangelist tells us at this point that the authorities did in fact understand Jesus’ “I am statements” to be unequivocally messianic, and not deific.

Oneness of Father and Son

In fact, the authorities get their wish and Jesus makes perhaps his most controversial statement yet: “I and the Father are one” (ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἓν ἐσμεν). As they pick up stones (once again) in order to create a melodramatic public display of disapproval, Jesus this time (unlike following John 8:58), engages them as to *why* they are doing what they are doing. Christ protects his flock and gives them eternal life through his teaching and their *full* acceptance of it. However, the Father is the *source of everything*, and it was He who gave (δέδωκέν) the sheep to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in the first place, and He *also* protects His shepherd’s flock - He and Jesus are one: in will, purpose, and intention, born out of love. In vs. 28-29, we now have the allusion to Zechariah 13:7 that I mentioned earlier. We now understand that when God said: “I will turn my hand upon the little ones,” He was referring to the *protection* (عناية) of the Disciples when the shepherd, the “man of God’s fellowship,” (من المقربين [Q 3:44.9]), will be struck. This oneness is due to Christ’s *theosis* (جمع) with the Father; a relational oneness that he offers his followers as well, and has nothing at all to do with any notion of *homoousion* or ontological henositic union (إتحاد) with God. Brown says about v. 30,

“we find that the unity posited there also concerns men; for just as the Father and Son are one, so they bind men to themselves as one - ‘that they may be one, even as we’ (xvii 11).”⁸³⁸ The authorities respond that Jesus had committed “blasphemy” (βλασφημία) because he “made himself a god (θεόν),” which may also be rendered *the* God. In other words, the authorities are *at least* charging Jesus with giving himself divine attributes that belong only to God, the Father. In vs. 37-38, however, Christ centralizes the Father by telling the authorities to believe in the works of the Father which He does *through* Christ. If the authorities can at least confess that Jesus does the works of God as a *navi* (نبي) or *tsaddiq* (صديق), such “partial faith” will eventually lead the authorities “to know and understand” (γνῶτε [aorist sub.] καὶ γινώσκητε [pres. sub.]) that Jesus has a unique unitive relationship with the Father because he is the *monogenes* Son, that is to say, *the one and only Messiah*. The reader of John should know at this point that Jesus is engaging a specific method of catechesis (κατηχησις), and pivotal to his teaching method is to “reason from the Scriptures” (διελέξατο αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν), to use the Lukan phrase from Acts 17:2.5. Jesus says in effect: “*Even* if I called myself ‘god/God’ (θεος), does not the Tanakh refer to Messengers of God as ‘gods?’ (Psalm 82:6; Exo. 7:1). Why do you think that is? Is it not because they are sanctified and holy men? This is how God (ο θεος) honors and exalts them. Yet you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am (εἰμι) the Son of God (Messiah) - sanctified and sent!?’ Your charge is not consistent with Scripture! But forget about nitpicking terms, look at my works! Do you not see that they are miracles? If so, how am I able to do them? Now look at my obedience to God and my character. Am I self-aggrandizing or do I give the glory to God? My works

⁸³⁸ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 407-408.

coupled with my ethics testify that I am true and that I love God and God loves me.”

Brown says: “The reason why the judges could be called gods was because they were vehicles of the word of God (vs. 35), but on that premise Jesus deserves so much the more to be called God... The Psalm concerns the judges who received the title of gods; one of John’s themes is that Jesus is the judge par excellence; Scripture thus finds its fulfillment in Jesus, who is par excellence worthy of the title given to judges.”⁸³⁹ “In no way would receiving revelation ever provide a reason to be associated with God as a partner in His godhead.”⁸⁴⁰ Hengel’s assertion that with John 10:30, “the Evangelist is on the way toward the Nicene Creed: θεον αληθινον εκ θεου αληθινου, γεννηθεντα ου ποιηθεντα, ομοουσιον τω πατρι,”⁸⁴¹ seems to me to be conveniently ignorant of its context. Rae argues that Jesus’ statement in John 14:28, “The Father is greater than I” (ὁ πατήρ μείζων μου ἐστίν) indicates “a functional subordination and not an ontological one,”⁸⁴² i.e. the Father is greater than the Son is His “office:” a clever way of dealing with the text, but in contradiction to the Council of Florence (1438-45) which dictates: “No one of them [the three persons] precedes the others in eternity, or *exceeds them in greatness*.” Moltmann comments: “Here the Trinity is a non-hierarchical community of *equals*”⁸⁴³ (emphasis mine), while Jesus the Son clearly admits his inferiority to the Father. While Trinitarian theologians continually maintain that the councils are grounded by Scripture, it is *at least* very difficult to justify Trinitarian concepts such as

⁸³⁹ *ibid*, 410.

⁸⁴⁰ Yahya Michot, “Revelation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 185.

⁸⁴¹ Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 272.

⁸⁴² Murray Rae, “The Testimony of Works in the Christology of John’s Gospel,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 298.

⁸⁴³ Jurgen Moltmann, “God in the World - the World in God: Perichoresis in Trinity and Eschatology,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 373.

Perichoresis with John 14:28 hanging around the text. As stated earlier, it is axiomatic that “Jesus of Nazareth,” the *incarnated* Logos, is not greater than the Father; this goes without saying. Jesus’ mentioning of the Father must be read in juxtaposition with “the Son.” The Father is greater than the Son because the former *caused* the latter’s existence. The Father is, in the language of the Patristics, “the very God” (*autotheos*) and uncaused (*agennetos*), and additionally, the only person of the “Trinity” who is called *ho theos* (*the God*) in Scripture and referred to *by the Son* as the “one true God” (*tov monon aleithinon theon* [John 17:21.5]) and even “my God” (*theov mou* [John 20:17.5]). From an Islamic standpoint, the Modal & Dynamic Monarchists as well as the Proto-orthodox were correct, there is indeed a nominal difference between the Father and Son, but contra Modalism, this isn’t the only difference, and contra Proto-orthodoxy, this difference was real, essential, and *ontological*. Tertullian points out that “one” here in the Greek of John 10:30 is the neuter “*hen*” (Lat. *unum*) and not the masculine *heis* (*unus*), with the former, according to him, referring to substance (*substantia*) and the latter to person (*persona*).⁸⁴⁴ Thus the text affirms *homoousion* theology while avoiding Modalism. Unfortunately for Tertullian, Jesus uses the same neuter word, “*hen*,” while praying for his Disciples to be “one, *just as we are one*” (ὥσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐν ἐσμεν [John 17:22.9]).

I would argue that Philo uses the word “god” (θεος) with reference to Moses in his *Life of Moses* in a way that is not dissimilar to how Jesus intends its usage here in John 10. Litwa says: “The mode of deification in Philo is participation. As true Being (το ον), Philo’s primal God is divine in and of himself. Other divine beings, by contrast, need

⁸⁴⁴ *Prax.* 25

to participate in the divinity of the Existent to gain the name of θεός.”⁸⁴⁵ According to Philo, the prophets, the ones to whom the “word of Allah came” (John 10:35.5), are “‘inspired’ (ἐπιθειαςας) (*Mos.* 2.259, cf 263, 272), “‘carried by God” (θεοφορεται) (*Mos.* 2.250, cf. 264, 273), or “‘possessed” (κατασχεθεις) (*Mos.* 2.288).⁸⁴⁶ When Moses became a prophet and received the word of God, he experienced a “metamorphosis (μεταμορφουμενος), transformed into a prophet (μεταβαλων υπο θεου)” and was “‘ensouled by God” (εψυχωσθαι υπο προφητην).⁸⁴⁷ The inspired Moses was “no longer in himself” (ουκετ ων εν εαυτω) (*Mos.* 2.250).”⁸⁴⁸ But Moses only “comes *near* to the Existent,”⁸⁴⁹ he is not actually Him. Christ as the perfect human manifestation of God’s well-pleasing Will, represented by the exalted epithet “the Logos,” was just as much θεός as Moses, in fact even more deservedly due to his unique relationship with the Father - “a unique god” (μονογενής θεός [John 1:18.5]).

Although I have mentioned various *ayat* and *ahadith* of the Prophet Muhammad which indicate theosis between God and the human being, I feel it is appropriate at this point in my theo-mystical exegesis of John 10 to list some of them together:

“Whoever obeys the Sent One, obeys God” (Q 4:80).⁸⁵⁰

من يطع الرسول فقد أطاع الله

“God and His Apostle; it is more befitting that you (all) please *Him* (meaning them)” (Q 9:62).

والله ورسوله أحق أن يرضوه

⁸⁴⁵ Litwa, “The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria,” in *The Studio Philonica: Annual Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Vol. XXVI, ed. David T. Runia, 13-14.

⁸⁴⁶ Quoted from *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁷ Quoted from *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁸ Quoted from *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁹ Quoted from *ibid.*

⁸⁵⁰ In Johannine and Philonic terms respectively: “Whoever obeys *theos*, obeys *ho theos*,” “Whoever obeys *theos*, obeys *ho on*.”

“And you did not throw when you threw; rather it was God who threw” (Q 8:17).
وما رميت إذ رميت ولكن الله رمى

“And he never speaks from himself; it is nothing other than Revelation revealed to him”
(Q 53:3-4).
وما ينطق عن الهوى إن هو إلا وحي يوحى

“(The Messenger is) kind (*ra’uf*) and merciful (*rahim*) to the believers” (Q 9:128).
بالمؤمنين رؤوف رحيم

“Who obeys me, obeys God; whoever disobeys me, disobeys God.”⁸⁵¹
من أطاعني فقد أطاع الله ومن عصاني فقد عصا الله

“Fatimah is a piece of my flesh; whoever angers her, angers me, and whoever angers me,
angers God.”⁸⁵²

فاطمة بضعة مني فمن أغضبها فقد أغضبني ومن أغضبني فقد أغضب الله

“Whoever sees me in a dream has seen the Truth.”⁸⁵³
من رآني في المنام فقد رآ الحق

“Whoever shows enmity towards my friend/saint (*wali*), then I will declare war of
him.”⁸⁵⁴

من عادى لي وليا فقد آذنت بالحرب

“My servant does not perform any action more beloved to Me than his obligatory acts
(*fara'idh*); and he continues to draw near unto me with supererogatory acts (*nawafil*)
until I love him. Then I become the hearing by which he hears, the eyesight by which he
sees, the hand by which he holds, and the foot by which he walks; and if he were to ask
anything from me I will surely give it to him.”⁸⁵⁵

وما تقرب إلي عبدي بشيء أحب إلي مما افترضته عليه، ولا يزال عبدي يتقرب إلي بالنوافل حتى أحبه. فإذا أحببته
كنت

سمعه الذي يسمع به، وبصره الذي يبصر به، ويده التي يبطش بها، ورجله التي يمشي بها، ولئن سألني لأعطينه.

The Love of Jesus and His Holy House (*Ahl al-Bayt*)

Chapter Eleven: (1) There was a certain sick man, Lazarus of Bethany,
from the village of Maryam and her sister Martha. (2) And this was the Maryam
who anointed the Master with myrrh and wiped his feet with her hair, whose

⁸⁵¹ Hadith of Bukhari.

⁸⁵² Hadith of Tirmidhi.

⁸⁵³ Hadith of Bukhari.

⁸⁵⁴ Hadith qudsi of Bukhari.

⁸⁵⁵ Hadith qudsi of Bukhari.

brother Lazarus was sick. (3) The sisters sent (messengers) unto him saying, "Master! Look, the one whom you (*philiopistically*) love is sick." (4) And having heard that, 'Isa said, "This sickness will not lead to (spiritual) death, but for the sake of the glory of Allah, so that the Son of Allah might be glorified through it." (5) And 'Isa *highly (agapistically)* loved Martha, her sister (Maryam), and Lazarus.⁸⁵⁶ (6) So when he heard that he was sick, he remained in that place where he was for two (more) days. (7) Then after this (period), he said to his disciples, "Let's go into Judea again." (8) The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, (just) now the Jewish authorities were seeking to stone you, and again you are going there?" (9) 'Isa answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? If someone walks during the day, he doesn't stumble, because the light of this world he sees. (10) But if someone walks during the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." (11) He said these things, and after this he said to them, "Lazarus, our dear friend, has fallen asleep, but I go (now) to wake him up." (12) So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." (13) But 'Isa had spoken about his (Lazarus') death, while they thought that he was speaking about literal sleep. (14) So 'Isa then said to them clearly, "Lazarus died. (15) And I rejoice for the sake of you all that I was not there - so that you might believe. But let us go to him!" (16) Therefore Thomas, who is called 'Didymus' (Twin), said to his fellow disciples, "Let's also go to die with him!"⁸⁵⁷

(17) Having arrived, 'Isa found that he had already been in the tomb four days. (18) And Bethany was close to Jerusalem, about fifteen *stadions* away. (19) And many Jews had come to Martha and Maryam in order to comfort them about (their) brother. (20) When Martha heard that 'Isa was coming, (she went and) met him; but Maryam was sitting in the house. (21) Martha said to 'Isa, "Master, if you had been here, my brother would not have died! (22) But even now I know (well) that whatever you ask Allah Allah will give to you. (23) 'Isa said to her, "*Resurrected*, your brother will be." (24) Martha said to him, "I know that he will be resurrected during the Resurrection on the Last Day..." (25) 'Isa said to her, "*I am* the resurrection and the life! The one who believes in me, even if he dies (in the flesh), will live (in the spirit). (26) And everyone who lives (in the spirit) and believes in me will never ever die (spiritually). Do you believe this? (27) She said to him, "Yes, Master! I have *already* believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of Allah, the one coming into the world."

The Seventh Sign: 'Isa Raises Lazarus by Allah's Leave

(28) And having said this, she (Martha) went and called Maryam, her sister, and said to her privately, "The teacher is present and calls for you." (29) So when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. (30) And 'Isa had not yet come to

⁸⁵⁶ John upgrades Jesus' love for Lazarus from *philiopistis* (v. 3) to *agapistis* (v. 5) when Mary(s) is(are) involved.

⁸⁵⁷ SMB Jerald Dirks speculates that Thomas may have been the one who was substituted for Jesus on the cross. See: Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 77-122. This Disciple is enigmatically called "Thomas" (Syr: *Tau'ma*; Gr: Didymus [Δίδυμος]), meaning "twin." Perhaps he was affectionately called by this name by Jesus himself due to his resemblance to Jesus. Could this explain the highly mysterious Qur'anic statement regarding the Crucifixion, "but it (he?) was made to appear so unto them" (Q 4:157.5)? See: Herbert C. Merillat, *Gnostic Apostle Thomas: "Twin" of Jesus* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corp., 2001).

the village, but was still in the place where Martha met him. (31) But when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Maryam quickly get up and leave, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the grave in order to mourn there. (32) When Maryam came where 'Isa was and saw him, she fell at his feet saying to him, "Husband, if you were here, my brother would not have died!" (33) When 'Isa saw her wailing and the Jews who came with her (also) wailing, he was deeply angered⁸⁵⁸ and agitated.⁸⁵⁹ (34) And he said, "Where have you put him?" They said to him, "Master, come and see." (35) 'Isa wept.⁸⁶⁰ (36) The Jews said, "Look how intimately he ('Isa) loved him!" (37) Some of them said, "Couldn't this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have done something so that he (Lazarus) would not have died?" (38) Therefore 'Isa, again deeply angered within himself, came to the tomb; it was a cave with a stone lying against it. (39) 'Isa said, "Remove the stone!" Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to him, "Master, he already stinks, for it has been four days." (40) 'Isa said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of Allah?" (41) Therefore they removed the stone; and 'Isa raised his eyes upwards and said, "Father, I am grateful to You because You have heard me. (42) And I knew (well) that You always hear me, but for the sake of the crowd standing around I said (it out loud), so that they might believe that You sent me." (43) And having said these things, he shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (44) The one who had died came out, his feet and hands bound with strips of cloth, and his face had been wrapped with a *sudarium*. 'Isa said to them, "Untie him and let him go!"

*As 'Attar's words give life to the soul,
Clearly he is of the same breath as Jesus.
- 'Attar, Diwan⁸⁶¹*

⁸⁵⁸ Ἐμβριμάομαι. The UBS 4th ed. Gives the definition of "experience deep feelings" and "be deeply moved" (281). The BDAG mentions additionally that the verb denotes "anger or displeasure." (254). I prefer the latter and have thus translated as above. It is not against the ethics of a prophet to become angry; on the contrary, if it is for God's sake, anger is "beloved by God" (أحب الأعمال إلى الله تعالى الحب في الله والبغض في الله) (Hadith of Abu Dawud and Ahmad).

⁸⁵⁹ Perhaps Jesus was angry due to Mary's lack of total submission to the will of God indicated by her statement, "If you were here..." (εἰ ἦς ὧδε). Christ expected more patience and resolve from his Holy House.

⁸⁶⁰ The evangelist distinguishes two Greek words for "weep," i.e. κλαίω and δακρύω. The former is used consistently by John to describe a type of weeping that is accompanied by the loss or death of someone (John 11:31, 33, 16:20, 20:11, 13, 15; cf. BDAG, 433: "of mourning for the dead") while the latter is used only once for Jesus in *this* verse (John 11:35), the Bible's shortest verse. Although it may be that Christ is also weeping due to the loss of Lazarus, even though he knows that the latter will be presently resurrected, perhaps Christ weeps due his family's lack of complete submission unto God's will, hence the hapax δακρύω. This is a *true* Sufi occasion for weeping, hence Jesus "bursts into tears" (BDAG, 170).

⁸⁶¹ Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 51.

Jesus as Extension of God

By resurrecting Lazarus, Jesus not only continues to mimic the “works of the Father,” but further demonstrates his role as Messiah by foreshadowing his *Parousia*, the future messianic age in which many dead will be raised, or what Maimonides would later call *Tahiyat HaMaytim*.⁸⁶² This is the seventh and greatest sign performed by Jesus in the Gospel of John. In the Qur’an we read: “(He [Jesus] is) a unique ‘Sent One’ (رَسُولًا) to the Israelites, (saying): ‘I have come with a Sign from your Father; indeed, I (ἐγὼ) form (lit. create) from clay the form of a bird, then I breath (فَأَنْفُخُ) unto it and it becomes a bird by the permission of God. And (I) heal the one *born* blind and heal the leper as well as *resurrect the dead by the permission of God*’” ([Q 3:49.5] (رَبُّوَاحِي الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ)). A few things to notice about this *ayah* from the standpoint of syntactical exegesis: 1) There is no explicit verb before the anarthrous Arabic accusative object *rasul*, thus stressing the conceptual direct object and highlighting its unique and one-of-a-kind (μονογενής) nature. 2) There is no verb such as “he said” (قال) prefacing the original discourse of Jesus rendering it difficult to determine where God’s speech ends and Jesus’ quote begins. This implies that Jesus’ speech *is* God’s speech because he is the sanctified and guided word of God. The lack of a verb also stresses the word *anni* (أني) meaning, “that I.” Suyuti mentions that the second occurrence of *anni* can be read as the familiar *inni* (إني), the exact equivalent of the Greek ἐγὼ εἶμι. There is also an implied “I” before the mentioning of the healing miracles. Therefore, this Qur’anic Christic logion appears to be an extended and slightly veiled “I am statement” in the style of the Johannine Gospel. 3) Jesus refers to his work as a “Sign” (آية) both in this *ayah* and again two *ayahs* later. The

⁸⁶² This is Maimonides’ principle no. thirteen in his *Commentary upon the Mishnah (Sanhedrin, 10)*.

Gospel of John likewise consistently refers to Jesus' miraculous works as "Signs" (σημεῖον). 4) Although the act of bringing clay birds to life does not appear in the canonical gospels, the act of Christic breathing as bringing new life only occurs in the Gospel of John (... He breathed [ἐνεφύσησεν] on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" [John 20:22.9]). Ibn 'Ajibah quotes al-Qushayri who says: "By 'breath' (نفس) the Sufis mean the repose which hearts find in the subtle emanations of the unseen (لطائف الغيوب). Someone who is granted breaths is at a higher level than someone granted a state (*hal*) or a moment (*al-waqt*). We could say that the one granted moments is at the beginning [of the way], the one granted breaths is at the end."⁸⁶³ 5) As already mentioned, the Arabic clearly mentions that Jesus healed a man *born* blind (أَبْرَى الْأَكْمَه), which is only mentioned in the Gospel of John, not in the Synoptics 6) After Jesus states his ability to raise the dead, he repeats the phrase "by the permission of God" (بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ) to "preclude any false attributions of divinity to him," according to al-Suyuti.⁸⁶⁴

In John 11:41, the evangelist tells us that Jesus "raised his eyes upwards" (ἤρην τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἄνω) while in (loud or audible) supplication to God. Muslim scholars maintain that while the Ka'bah (كعبة) is the direction (قبلة [*qiblah*]) of the five prescribed prayers (صلوات), the "heavens are the qiblah of the supplication" (السماء قبلة الدعاء). The Prophet Muhammad once casted a glance towards the heavens (نَرَى تَقْلَبَ وَجْهَكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ) and supplicated in his heart that the *qiblah* be changed from Jerusalem back to Mecca, the original *qiblah*. The Prophet did not appear to audiblize his request but simply possessed a longing (شوق) in his heart for the change of direction. Due to his high position and

⁸⁶³ Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa'iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 65.

⁸⁶⁴ *al-Jalalayn*, Q 3:49.

wilayah with his Lord, the *qiblah* was indeed changed to Mecca - because “you are pleased with it” (تَرْضَاهَا [Q 2:144.9]). Our Lady ‘A’isha once commented, “I do not see but that your Lord hurries in pleasing you,”⁸⁶⁵ thus echoing Martha’s comment to Christ, “But even now I know well that whatever you might ask God, God will give (it) to you” (John 11:22). “This presupposes that Jesus engages in petitionary prayer and that his prayers are effective (cf. also 9:31).”⁸⁶⁶ In John 11, Jesus makes loud his supplication “for the sake of the crowd standing around I said (it out loud), so that they might believe that *You sent me*” (John 11:42.9). Therefore, Jesus only performs this great Sign by the power and “permission of God” (بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ) and for the express purpose of proving that he is an *apostle* of God. He does not have the intrinsic ability to do anything independent from God: “I am not able to do anything by myself” (οὐ δύναμαι ἐγὼ ποιεῖν ἅπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐδέν [John 5:30.1]); “on my own I do nothing” (ἅπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ ποιῶ οὐδέν [John 8:28.5]). The miracle of raising the dead is not a sign of deity nor even prophecy (نبوة) but rather *divinity*, *wilayah* (ولاية); this ability is attributed to Sufi Masters such as ‘Abdul Qadir Jilani (d. 561/1166)⁸⁶⁷ as well as to saints such as Peter (Acts 9:36-41 where he raised Tabitha) and Paul (Acts 20:7-12 where he raised Eutychus). However Muslim theologians maintain that there are actually five types of miracles: 1) *mu’jizah* (معجزة): prophetic miracle; 2) *karamah* (كرامة): saintly miracle; 3) *ma’unah* (معونة): miracle performed by non-prophet/saint; 4) *istidraj* (استدراج): miracles or pseudo-miracles performed through impermissible means; 5) *ihanah* (إهانة): miracles performed specifically by false prophets. However, the true “miracle” according to al-Jilani and

⁸⁶⁵ *Hadith* of Bukhari.

⁸⁶⁶ Andrew L. Lincoln, “The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 222.

⁸⁶⁷ See: Sadia Dehlvi, *Sufism: The Heart of Islam* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010).

Ahmad al-Rifa'i is a person's *istiqamah*, that is, his uprightness in the religion and obedience to God's prescriptive will.

Within the Hebrew biblical tradition, we see that the great 9th c BCE prophets Elijah and his successor Elisha were able to raise the dead by the power and permission of God as well (1 Kings 17:21-22; 2 Kings 4:32-35; 2 Kings 13:20-21). In the latter, it was only the *bones* of Elisha that came into contact with a dead man that caused the latter's resurrection! In the foremost passage (1 Kings 17:21-22), when Elijah raises the widow's son, she says to Elijah: "Now this I have come to know: That you are a man of God and the Word of the Lord is in your mouth truthfully" (1 Kings 17:24.9) (עֲתָה יָדָהּ (יְדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה וְדְבַר־יְהוָה בְּפִיךָ אֱמָתָה); a similar confession appears upon the lips of Martha in John 11:27 but *before* the raising of Lazarus, indicating that Martha, as a member of the Christic *Hagioikos*, had full faith in Jesus even prior to the miracle: "I have *already* believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world;" (ἐγὼ πεπίστευκα ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐρχόμενος [John 11:27.9]). According to Ghazali's Ash'arite atomistic Occasionalism, while we may attribute the miracle to "Jesus," God's revelator and sanctified agent, we realize that God is the primary and direct cause of everything in the cosmos. The "*kufi*" (covering) of the Trinitarian, according to Ibn al-'Arabi, is the fact that he attributes the actions of Christ ultimately to Christ himself, thus "covering" God, the One who did (فعل) the miracle *through* Christ.⁸⁶⁸ The concept, taken from the *hadith qudsi*, of God being "the eye of Christ, the hand of Christ" and "the foot of Christ," intimates the divinization of the human soul; one becomes "godlike" or "lordly" (ربانيين) in one's character and actions

⁸⁶⁸ Ibn Al 'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom (Fusus al-Hikam)*, trans. by R.W.J. Austin (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 177.

by aligning one's desires (هوى) with God's well-pleasing (preferential) Will (إرادة). At this point, even natural law (الحكم العادي) ceases to be an obstacle for the human agent if he should supplicate to his Beloved: the One who says, "If he were to ask me anything, I will surely give it to him."⁸⁶⁹ Perhaps Matthew said it best: "And having seen (this miracle), the crowds *feared and glorified God* (τὸν θεόν), the One who gave such authority/permission (ἐξουσίαν) unto human beings" (Matt. 9:8).

The Death of 'Isa as a Sacrifice for the Jewish Nations Predicted by Caiaphas

(45) Many of the Jews who had come to Maryam and saw the things which he did believed in him. (46) But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which 'Isa did. (47) Therefore the chief priests and Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What do we do? This man does many signs. (48) If we leave him alone, many will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away our positions⁸⁷⁰ (as leaders) and our nation!" (49) But one of them, a certain Caiaphas, being the High Priest that year, said to them, "You all don't know anything! (50) Nor have you considered that it is better for you that one man should die for the sake of the people so that the whole nation may not be destroyed." (51) And this he did not say on his own, but being the High Priest that year prophesied that 'Isa was about to die for the sake of the nation. (52) And not for the sake of the nation alone, but also (for) the children of Allah who had been scattered (among the Gentiles); that they might be gathered together into one (united nation under the Messiah). (53) Therefore from that day, they plotted to kill him.

'Isa Stops Teaching the Spiritual Path in Public

(54) 'Isa no longer *walked* openly among the Jewish authorities, but departed from there to the region near the desert, to a city called Ephraim, and remained there with the disciples. (55) The Passover of the Jews was near, so many went up to Jerusalem from the country before the Passover in order to purify themselves. (56) They (the Jewish authorities) were seeking 'Isa and said to one another while standing in the Temple, "What do you think? He will never come to the festival, will he?" (57) And the chief priests and Pharisees had issued orders that if anyone should know where he is, he must report it so that they might arrest him.

The Essence of Infidelity

⁸⁶⁹ *Hadith Qudsi* of Bukhari.

⁸⁷⁰ The Greek here is τόπος, literally meaning "place, location," and could even be a reference to the Temple; cf. R. Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 439.

Chapter Twelve: (1) Six days before the Passover, 'Isa came into Bethany, where Lazarus was, the one whom 'Isa raised from the dead. (2) So they made supper for him, and Martha served, while Lazarus was one of those seated at the table with him. (3) Then Maryam, having taken a pound of pure and expensive myrrh of nard, anointed the feet of 'Isa and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the myrrh. (4) But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, and the one about to betray him, said, (5) "Why wasn't this myrrh sold for three-hundred silver coins and given to the poor?" (6) But he said this not because he had any concern for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having the moneybag, he used to steal what was put into it. (7) 'Isa said, "Leave her alone, she has kept this for the day of my burial. (8) For the poor you will always have with you, but *me* you will not always have."

(9) Then a large crowd of Jews found out that 'Isa was there, so they came; not only because of 'Isa alone, but in order to see Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead. (10) But the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus too, (11) Because many of the Jews, on account of him, were deserting and believed in 'Isa.

*Happy news, O heart!
The Jesus-breath has come!
From his wholesome spirit
wafts the fragrance of the One.
- Hafez⁸⁷¹*

Jesus is King of the Lower Self

(12) The next day, the large crowd that had come to the festival, hearing that 'Isa was coming to Jerusalem, (13) took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him shouting, "Save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the Name of the Lord, (and is) the King of Israel!" (14) And finding a donkey, 'Isa sat upon it, as it is written, (15) "Don't be afraid, daughter of Zion! Look! Your King comes seated upon the colt of a donkey." (16) His disciples did not understand these (events) at first, but when 'Isa was glorified⁸⁷² they remembered that these (events) were written about him as well as (remembered) the things that they did to him. (17) The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from the dead, continued to give witness (about the resurrection of Lazarus). (18) For this reason, (another) crowd met him, because they heard that he had done this sign (from the first crowd). (19) Therefore the Pharisees said to one another (in a meeting), "You are getting nowhere! Look! The world has gone after him!"

⁸⁷¹ Quoted from Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 39.

⁸⁷² Raised from the dead and then to Allah.

The Way of Humility

After Jesus spends the night in Bethany with his wife and in-laws, he makes his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12-19), where he fulfills the words of the prophet Zechariah who said: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Your King will come to you; (he will be) just/righteous/sanctified/*divine* (צַדִּיק) and *going to be saved he* (will be) (וְנוֹשָׁע הוּא)! Humble (he is), and riding upon a donkey” (Zech. 9:9.1-5). Jesus is the King who will be “saved by God” (Y’shu’a [יֵשׁוּעַ]) according to this verse, referring to him as *Nosha*,’ (נוֹשָׁע) the Niphal active participle yet passive in meaning, and related etymologically to “Jesus.” David writes in the Psalms (20:6): “Now I know that God *will save* (הוֹשִׁיעַ [Hiphil prophetic perfect])⁸⁷³ His Messiah (מְשִׁיחֹו), He shall hear him from His holy heaven, with the saving power of His right hand.” However, the saving of Jesus will only manifest *after* he fulfills his mission as Savior as it relates to this world. Thus a few verses after describing Christ’s Entry into the city, the evangelist tells us that Christ clarifies the nature of his saving for his audiences: “Now my soul is troubled; so should I pray, ‘Father save me from *this* hour?’ - No, for this reason I came into *this* hour” (John 12:27)! In other words, “I have work to do first!” As stated earlier, Jesus is the Savior in several ways: 1) he encourages repentance 2) he provides saving gnosis by adherence to his teaching and exemplary character 3) he gives his life to save his nation from imminent destruction 4) he is a (future) military leader/redeemer (*goel*) and judge (*hakam*) 5) he gives intercession on the Day of Judgment. My textually-affirming theo-mystical Muslim hermeneutic of John is the only lens by which *all* of the key messianic/Christic Qur’anic and Biblical passages,

⁸⁷³ Also called the “perfect of certitude;” cf. Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed., revised and expanded by John C. Beckman (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007), 68.

such as Q 3:55; 4:157; Isa. 53; Psalm 20:6; Zech. 9:9, may be harmonized. We no longer have to play the game of “Did Jesus die or was he saved?” “Was he resurrected or did he ascend?” The answer is all of the above.

Christ is the Shepherd King who rides humbly upon a beast of burden. This is a nice parallel to the description of Jesus as “the lamb of God” at the beginning of the Book of Signs, showing “that God’s love comes to humanity in weakness and hiddenness.”⁸⁷⁴ According to Ghazali, the donkey can be likened to the disciplined thus tranquil lower self or *al-nafs al-mutna’innah* (الأنفـس المـطمئنـة), as opposed to the untrained wild horse, which if mounted, would carry its rider to wherever *it* wished; it is the *nafs* which incites toward evil (*al-nafs al-amarah bi’s-su* [الأنفـس الأمارـة بالسوء]). Christ is “upon” (على, لا) the donkey, meaning that he has dominated (تمكن) the lower self and is Master over it, as the Prophet Muhammad is “upon magnificent ethics” (على خلق عظيم). Rumi compares the *nafs* to a camel whose rider, Majnun (the Lover), must direct to the dwelling place of his beloved. Christ rides the donkey into the holy city and goes to the House of God, the Temple. The aspirant who embarks upon the spiritual path with Jesus as his Spiritual Guide must follow the latter’s lead by mastering his *nafs* by directing it towards God; he must strive to transform himself (become: الأنفـس اللوامـة) and actualize divine sanctification (ولاية) by God and thus become, like Jesus, a *tsaddiq* (صديق); he must cultivate within himself a sense of brokenness (إنكسار) before God and humility before God’s creation. If he should do these things, he will find himself in God’s holy dwelling.

⁸⁷⁴ Schnelle, Trans. Boring, *Theology of the New Testament*, 693.

The Path to Transformation of the Lower Self: Adherence to the Messiah

(20) There were some Hellenized Jews among those who had come up (to Jerusalem) in order to worship during the festival. (21) So these (Jews) came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him saying, “Sir,⁸⁷⁵ We want to see 'Isa.” (22) Philip went and told Andrew, then both Andrew and Philip told 'Isa. (23) And 'Isa answered them saying, “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. (24) Indeed, I say unto you: Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single lone seed. But if it should die (in the earth), it brings forth much fruit! (25) The one who loves his lower self (*philiopistically*), loses it; but the one who hates his lower self in this world, will keep it safe (by transforming it) for eternal life. (26) If *anyone* should attend to me, let him follow me (in my path), and wherever I am, there my attendant will also be (in the “heart” of the Father); if anyone should attend to me, my Father will honor him!”

Contrary to popular Jewish expectation, Jesus does not undertake any type of action that would be perceived as militaristic or subversive; there is no post-entry cleansing of the Temple in John. He rather makes an immediate passion prediction by comparing himself to a wheat grain whose death is necessary in order to produce much fruit, and then begins a monologue about “the lower self.” Such a display of “radical messianism” on the part of Jesus becomes too much for the masses to stomach, especially the Jewish authorities, and their cries of “Hosanna!” on this day eventually become cries of “Crucify! Crucify! (Σταύρωσον σταύρωσον [John 19:6.5]) just a few days later. As Jesus *rode* the donkey in, symbolizing his salvific teaching of the mastery of the self and its cosmopolitan nature, he *carried* the cross out, symbolizing the “sins” of his nation having been laid upon his shoulders, on the *very* day in which the paschal lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple. Christ is the *new* Temple; he is the one who houses the indwelling of the Spirit of God and just as blood and water flowed out of the Temple due to the priests washing the sacred precincts, blood and water will flow from Christ when he is pierced on the cross (John 19:34). The Triumphal Entry of Jesus represents the

⁸⁷⁵ Greek: Κύριε.

Christic actualization of mystical Kingship (ملكوت). According to Ibn ‘Ajibah, every name (اسم) of God contains three elements in relation to humanity: *ta'alluq* (تعلق), *takhalluq* (تخلق), and *tahaqquq* (تحقق). With respect to God as King, we must come to know that He is the Sovereign Lord of the universe who has no partner, consort, nor equal, and that we are His impoverished slaves (عباد). This is our *ta'alluq* (association) to His Name. Yet an aspirant must also know that he is to exercise dominion and kingship over *his* “slaves,” that is, his hands (اليدين), feet (الرجلين), stomach (البطن), eyes (العينين), ears (الأذنين), tongue (اللسان), and genitals (الفرج), or what Ahmad b. Zayn al Habashi calls, the “seven inroads to the heart” in his treatise *The Essentials of Islam* (chap. 3: “Keeping the Heart from Vices” [حفظ القلب من المعاصي]).⁸⁷⁶ This is our *takhalluq* (assimilation) to His Name. Finally, the aspirant comes to actualize Kingship over his slaves by subjugating and then dominating them, thus “domesticating” his lower self as if it were a beast of burden. This is the meaning of the statement of the people of knowledge: “He who knows himself, knows his Lord” (من عرف نفسه عرف ربه). When Muhammad entered Mecca during its Conquest, Muslim historiographers mention that he rode into the sacred precincts upon his camel Qaswa with his head lowered in humility before his Lord; his blessed beard touching the back of Qaswa’s neck. We must all be Christic or Muhammadan; we must tread the mystical path leading to mastery of the lower self and union with the Master of all, the King of the universe. This is our *tahaqquq* (actualization) to His Name.

Speaking of the “lower self,” I believe that translating the Greek ψυχή as simply “life,” is a bit misleading. Is Jesus really telling us to hate our “lives?” If so, then what could it mean for us to have “life to its fullest” (John 10:10.9)? The key here lies in the

⁸⁷⁶ Ahmed ibn Zayn al-Habashi, *The Essentials of Islam*, trans. by Abdul Aziz Ahmed (Birmingham: Islamic Village, 2008), 39-47.

Greek. The Johannine author uses *two* words for “life:” ψυχή and ζωή. The former is used ten times by the evangelist and denotes a type of life that is tied to this world, “an earthly life;”⁸⁷⁷ a living for oneself that is actually translated by the BDAG as “breath of (life).”⁸⁷⁸ Thus this word is quite similar to the Arabic nafs (نفس) or Hebrew nefes (נפש),⁸⁷⁹ which denotes the “lower self” and is also related to “breathing” (nafas [نَفَس]). I believe that Jesus uses the word ψυχή (psyche) in both of these ways throughout the Gospel. Firstly, he exhorts his listeners to transcend their egos and selfish cravings, or what the Buddha called *tanha*, and be vigilant about what we expose ourselves to, which will in turn, if we embark seriously upon the path, adorn (تخليّة) and transform (تجليّة) our *nufus* (pl. of *nafs*) totally under God’s obedience (طاعة) (John 15:25-26). Secondly, he uses ψυχή as something he “puts down” for the sake of others - his very “breath” - his earthly life (John 10:15, 17; 13:37; 15:13). Thus every single person has a ψυχή. Possessing ζωή, however, is not automatic; it is only given by God after one secures complete faith in Jesus Christ, according to the evangelist. The word ζωή is used thirty-six times in the Gospel of John to denote *eternal* life, which begins for the believing follower of Jesus as soon as he believes. Thus he enters into a new life with God having been born of the Spirit, in addition to his first water birth (John 3:15-16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47-48, 59, 68; 10:10, 28; 12:25, 50; 17:2-3). Now we can certainly understand John 10:11 (and John 10:10) quoted above by appreciating the difference between ψυχή and ζωή:

ἐγὼ ἦλθον ἵνα **ζωὴν** ἔχωσιν καὶ περισσὸν ἔχωσιν

I came so that you might have (*eternal*) life and have it to its fullest (10:10.9).

⁸⁷⁷ BDAG, 893.

⁸⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 894.

ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς τὴν **ψυχὴν** αὐτοῦτίθησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd puts down his (*earthly*) life (his “breath”) for the sake of the sheep (10:11).

In v. 26 the evangelist quotes Jesus revealing to his followers the way in which he might be “served” (διακονέω)⁸⁸⁰ after his departure with the apodosis “(then) let him follow me,” and the verb “to follow” in the third-person present imperative. To serve Christ means to serve or help his cause. Perhaps the Qur’an has this *Injilic* statement in mind when it quotes Jesus asking the Disciples: “Who will be my helpers (since I am going or ‘in my fleeing’⁸⁸¹) to God?” and they answered “We will be God’s helpers (أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ)!” (Q 3:52.5). Christ continues to reveal that if one were to follow him, the follower, or “attendant” (deacon), will be wherever Christ is - and “where” is Christ? - in the ‘heart’ (κόλπον) of the Father (John 1:18.5) - “Your place is in the bosom of my Mercy,” as Ghazali said.⁸⁸² In other words, the attendant will be, like Christ, beloved and honored of God. Thus we have come full circle. The Prologue referred to Jesus being the means by which we might become children of God and now in John 12, Christ reveals that this is accomplished by living Christic lives; that is to say, by fully believing in Christ, living selflessly for the sake of others, and sincerely for God.

‘Isa Commands the People to Embark upon the Spiritual Path

(27) “Now my soul is troubled; so should I pray, “Father save me from *this* hour?” - No, for this reason I came into *this* hour! (28) Father, glorify your Name!” Then a voice came from the heaven, “I have both glorified (it), and will glorify (it) again!” (29) The crowd standing there, having heard (the voice) said, “It was thunder.” Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” (30) ‘Isa answered and said, “Not for

⁸⁸⁰ This verb is used only three times in John; twice in 12:26 and once in 12:2: “Martha served.”

⁸⁸¹ al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, Q 3:52.

⁸⁸² Quoted from Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 93.

my sake was this voice, but for your sakes.”⁸⁸³ (31) Now is the judgment of this world, now the ruler of this world will be thrown out. (32) And if I should be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people unto me.” (33) This he said, signifying by what sort of death he was about to die. (34) Therefore the crowd answered him, “We heard from the Torah that al-Masih remains forever, so how can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” (35) 'Isa answered and said to them, “Yet a little time (remains) while the light is *among you*.⁸⁸⁴ Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. The one walking in the darkness⁸⁸⁵ has no idea where he is going (spiritually). (36) While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you might become sons of the light.” 'Isa spoke these things then left and concealed himself from them.

Spiritual Dumbness, Blindness, and Cowardice

(37) But even though he had done so many miracles in front of them, they did not believe in him; (38) so that the statement of Isaiah the Prophet might be fulfilled who said, “Lord! Who has believed our message? And the arm of the Lord has been revealed to whom?”⁸⁸⁶ (39) For this reason, they were unable to believe; because again Isaiah said, (40) “He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart,⁸⁸⁷ so that they may not see with their eyes; nor understand with (their) heart and turn (to Me), so that I might heal them.”⁸⁸⁸ (41) Isaiah said these things because he saw his ('Isa's) glory, and spoke about him. (42) Nevertheless, many of the (Jewish religious) leaders believed in him, but because of the Pharisees, did not confess (their belief) in order not to be excommunicated from the synagogue. (43) For they loved the glory of human beings more than the glory of Allah.

Christ: The Word of God under His Command

(44) And 'Isa cried out and said, “The one who believes in me, does not believe in me, but in the One who sent me. (45) And the one who sees me, sees the One who sent me. (46) I have come as a light into the world, so that all who believe in me may not remain in darkness. (47) And if someone should hear my words but not obey (them), I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world (this time),⁸⁸⁹ but to save the world. (48) The one who rejects me and does not receive

⁸⁸³ I believe this is meant to equal the Israelites' experience in the wilderness with Moses when they heard the voice of God.

⁸⁸⁴ ἐν ὑμῖν, lit. “in you.” The Qur'an says: “God will not punish them while you are among (lit. “in”) them” (ما كان الله ليعذبهم وأنت فيهم [Q 8:33.1-5]). The very presences of Christ and Muhammad stave off Divine wrath.

⁸⁸⁵ i.e. Judas or the “Judasic” mentality.

⁸⁸⁶ Cf. Isaiah 53:1.

⁸⁸⁷ “Heart” is in the singular (acc.): αὐτῶν τὴν καρδίαν (“*their heart*”). The evangelist is engaging in a critical rewriting of the Tanakh in which the collective heart of the ancient Egyptians represented by the Pharaoh becomes a typology of the collective heart of the Israelites at the time of “the new Moses,” Jesus Christ.

⁸⁸⁸ This is a paraphrase of Isaiah 6:10; also cf. “... having hearts (قلوب) with which they do not understand, eyes (أعين) with which they do not see, and ears (أذان) with which they do not hear...” (Q 7:179.5) - they are uncomprehending, misunderstanding, and disobedient.

⁸⁸⁹ Jesus is the Anointed One (المسيح) just as kings, prophets, and priests were consecrated by oil according to the Pentateuch and Deteronomimistic Historian and given the title *mashiakh*, “a Christ.” However Jesus

my words (already) has something that will judge him - the *message* which I have spoken; *that* will condemn him on the Last Day. (49) Because not on my own have I spoken, but the Father who sent me - He Himself has given me a command, *what* I should say, and *how* I should speak it. And I know (well) that His command is eternal life. Therefore, what I speak I speak just as the Father has told me.”

END OF THE BOOK OF SIGNS, and thus the public ministry of 'Isa al-Masih.

Followers of Jesus and Beloved Ones of God

John 12:36 is the final imperative of Jesus to the public before the Book of Glory: “Believe (fully) in *the light* (τὸ φῶς in the accusative denoting “complete faith”) so that you might become sons (υἱοὶ) of the light.” The light is Jesus (John 1:9; 8:12; 9:5) and becoming his “sons” means to “walk” the spiritual path delineated in his teachings and become his Disciples. Thus Jesus calls his Disciples “little children” (τεκνία) in the next chapter of John, but also promises that he will not leave them as “orphans” (ὀρφανούς), indicating his return after the resurrection and subsequent arrival of the Paraclete. The evangelist uses the word υἱοὶ to denote *Christ’s* children, but τεκνία to denote God’s children. This distinction is also made between Jesus and other believers, as previously mentioned. Namely, while Jesus is called the “Son of God” (υἱός Θεοῦ) by the Johannine author, denoting his Christhood and thus unique and more intimate relationship with God, the believers at large are called τεκνία, meaning to *become* sons by “adoption” through complete faith in the Gospel. The Disciples are no more the *literal* “sons” (υἱοὶ) of Jesus than Jesus is the literal Son (υἱός) of God; the titles are honorific and indicate a hierarchy

is unique (*monogenes*) in the sense that he was consecrated by God Himself and aided by angels. This may explain the dicta of the Prophet Muhammad who said that he saw Jesus in visions having wet (oily) hair and leaning on two angels (Cf. Bukhari, bk. 87, no. 128; Muslim bk. 40, no. 7015). In his first coming, Jesus acts in the capacity of a priest and prophet, but will manifest his kingly (political) aspect in the *Parousia*. Therefore, he states in John 12:47 that he does not “judge the world” this time, but saves it; he possesses no earthly kingdom in order to carry out legal rulings (أحكام) and enforce penal punishments (حدود).

with respect to *rank* (مقام) in God's eyes. The υἱοὶ (followers) of Jesus become the τέκνία (beloved) of God through their belief in the υἱός (unique Messiah) of God. For those who continue to maintain that there is an *essential* “*ousion*” difference between Jesus as υἱός and believers as τέκνία, and that the evangelist wants to demonstrate the deity of Jesus by drawing this distinction, I would direct them to see John 10:34 where Jesus partially quotes Psalm 82:6 in which righteous Jews are called υἱοὶ in the LXX.⁸⁹⁰ Jesus actually uses this scriptural verse to demonstrate that he is not blaspheming by claiming to be the υἱός of God.

The evangelist tells us that Jesus begins his final statements of the Book of Signs by “crying out” (ἐκπαῖεν), as if to demonstrate his compassion for his listeners as well as to communicate the earnestness of his call. Christ then equates belief in him with belief in God, for faith in God is incomplete without faith in His Messiah. In v. 48 Jesus makes a statement reminiscent of Muhammad's final sermon at 'Arafah and intimates that he has delivered the message of the Gospel to the people, and that the message itself will condemn the rejecter of it on the Day of Judgment. The reason for the condemnation is that Jesus did not speak “on his own” (ἑαυτοῦ), the words were of the Father, the One who sent him. Christ is the “mouthpiece” of God who is under His “command” (ἐντολή) as to “what” he should say, and “how” he should speak it. In other words, Jesus is receiving two degrees of Revelation, the Book and Wisdom: “And He will teach him (Jesus) the Book (الكتاب) and Wisdom (الحكمة)” (Q 3:48.5). These constitute the *ipsissima verba* and *vox* of God respectively: the Revelation (*wahy min Allah*) and its Christic

⁸⁹⁰ “I said, ‘You are (all) gods and sons of the Most High!’” (ἐγὼ εἶπα θεοὶ ἐστε καὶ υἱοὶ ὑψίστου πάντες; :אֲנִי־אָמַרְתִּי אֱלֹהִים וּבְנֵי עֶלְיוֹן כֻּלְּכֶם).

commentary and clarification (*wahy min wasitah nabi*) captured by the inspired evangelist (*wahy min wasitah wali*). All of this is the *Injil*, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Seven: The “*Injil* Archetype” Textually-Critical “*Polemirenic*” Theo- Mystical Muslim Approach to the Gospel of John

Introduction

This approach to the Gospel of John assumes that Jesus received a Revelation from God very similar to the Qur'an in both process (of revelation) and content. This Revelation is referred to in the Qur'an as *al-Injil* (الإنجيل). However, this “true” *Injil*, or “*Injil* Archetype,” is no longer extant, but only “reflected” in some way in the four canonical “gospels,” which I have called “pseudo-gospels” (الأنجيل الأربعة) earlier, and one of these pseudo-gospels was the Gospel of John. This is the approach of Ibn Taymiyyah whose *Radd al-Sahih*, in contradistinction to al-Ghazali and al-Biq'a'i, argued for *tahrif* (تحريف) of the *Injil* on the level of *both* text (نص) and exegetical tradition (تفسير). Dirks, a popular contemporary *supposed* proponent of this approach, says quite assuredly: “The four canonical gospels of Christianity are definitely not this book of revelation [the *Injil*].”⁸⁹¹ According to al-Sabuni, “The Divine *Injil* that Allah revealed to His slave and prophet, Jesus the son of Maryam, is not the one found with the Christians today... with the passing of time, [it] was discarded by the people; consequently, it was lost.”⁸⁹² Since this approach assumes that the Archetype was revealed in Syriac, the Greek Gospel of John is

⁸⁹¹ Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 43.

⁸⁹² al-Sabuni, *Al-Nabuwwa wa'l Anbiya*, 'trans. by Muhammad Idris Esau under the title *Prophethood and the Prophets*, 212.

immediately dismissed *a priori*. Thus the Johannine Gospel seems to be an amalgamation of: 1) “True” teachings (حقائق) of Jesus Christ in *meaning* (بالمعنى), albeit written by (an) uninspired author(s) according to memory of handed-down traditions. These teachings can only cautiously be deemed as “true” on the condition that they do not explicitly contradict the essential creed (عقيدة) of Sunni orthodoxy; 2) Corrupted/fabricated teachings (تحريفات) of Jesus Christ (or attributed to him) either by intention or accident that were perpetuated thus recorded and/or invented by the autograph author who wanted to convey his own community’s theo-christological positions. These corruptions to the early oral traditions (*kerygma*) occurred during the “pre-John period” from approximately 33 CE - 90/95 CE or during the actual composition of the Gospel by the author; 3) Corrupted/fabricated teachings (تحريفات) of Jesus Christ (or attributed to him) that were invented by later scribes for theo-christological reasons. These corruptions to the text occurred during the “post-John period” from approximately 90/95 CE - 610 CE (the commencement of the Qur’anic Revelation). This textually-critical approach motivated by belief in the *Injil* Archetype is the most popular approach to the New Testament Gospels among Muslims. Thus, in this chapter, I will refer to these Muslim biblical critics as “standard Muslim biblicists” (SMB[s]) and this method as “standard Muslim biblicism” (SMBm). Whether they are being *truly polemirenical*, however, remains to be seen.

In this chapter, I will engage the Gospel of John through secular scholarship, that is, non-confessionally/theologically, although I am aware that there will be minor or major theological implications resulting from my engagement; such an approach is certainly not without bias. It is also important to note that a “non-theological” perspective

of a text does not necessarily equate to a rejection of “divine action in history” or a “suspicious attitude toward claims of divine revelation.”⁸⁹³ Such rejecters, in adherence to Van Harvey, are sometimes referred to as the “Troeltschians” as I stated in chapter one. Historical scholars who take the other position, namely that miracles and divine revelation are possible, are called “Duhemians” and include the likes of John Meier and Alvin Plantinga.⁸⁹⁴ SMBs, however, *must* believe in miracles and divine revelation. The crucial question is: Is John a divine revelation? This approach to John will involve textual criticism as well as a pre-canonical/exegetical analysis of the Gospel in which its themes and contents will be analyzed as a product of its historical, that is to say, its theological, social, and cultural milieu. In other words, I will situate the Gospel within its historical context and examine how the Gospel is in dialogue with its initial audience. This method attempts to detangle the Jesus of history from the highly mystical Johannine Christ of the extended Book of Signs, or the “textual Jesus.” I will then analyze my findings in light of Islam’s belief in Jesus and the *Injil*.

Textual Criticism and the “Post-John period”

Before we can engage the text of John itself, we must determine what the original text was. In other words, we need to weed out the “post-John” alterations made to the text by subsequent scribes. The lofty aim of the textual critic of the New Testament is to establish its original (autograph) text given the facts that none of the original Greek documents of the New Testament are extant today, and the existing manuscripts, which

⁸⁹³ C. Stephen Evans, “The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 115.

⁸⁹⁴ *ibid.*

number over 5,500,⁸⁹⁵ are all different – no two of them are exactly identical.⁸⁹⁶ In fact, according to Ehrman, there are somewhere between 200,000 to 300,000 differences found within these thousands of manuscripts⁸⁹⁷ which translate to “more differences [in the MSS] than there are *words* in the New Testament.”⁸⁹⁸ These manuscripts range in size from credit-card sized John Rylands’ papyrus number 52 (P52, inventory no. 457; c. 125-150 CE) found in a garbage heap in upper Egypt in 1920 and containing a few verses of John 18, to vast majuscule codices written on hundreds of pages of parchment. John Mill’s 1707 CE attempt at an eclectic text of the Greek New Testament led him to state in his primitive apparatus that he found over 30,000 differences in the one hundred or so MSS that he had at this disposal.⁸⁹⁹ Even a theologian as early as the prolific Origen (Ὠριγενής) of Alexandria (d. 254 CE) once complained:

“The differences among the manuscripts have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, *they make additions or deletions as they please*” (emphasis mine).⁹⁰⁰

⁸⁹⁵ These are dated from the second-century to the sixteenth-century CE, with most of them being produced in the Middle Ages.

⁸⁹⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition (D-Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 10.

⁸⁹⁷ Rothschild goes with the low-end figure of 200,000. See: Clare Rothschild, “Historical Criticism,” in *Methods for Luke*, ed. Joel B. Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 9-41. While working on a collation between B03 *Biblorum Sacrorum Graecus Vaticanus* (Codex Vaticanus), and Codex Boreelianus (tenth century CE) for Dr. Jean-Francois Racine at the Graduate Theological Union, I documented more than seventy discrepancies within Matthew 18:18-19:14a & 24:48-25:22a of B03 and Folios 29-31 & 51-52 of Boreelianus – less than fifty-eight verses.

⁸⁹⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 83-84.

⁸⁹⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰⁰ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 52; Ehrman cites the source of this as: *Commentary on Matthew* 15.14, as quoted in Bruce Metzger, “Explicit References in the Works of Origen to Variant Readings in the New Testament Manuscripts,” in *Biblical and Patristic Studies in Memory of Robert Pierce Casey*, ed. J. Neville Birdsall and Robert W. Thomson (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 78-79. This is also quoted by Chadwick, *The Early Church*, who cites: Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, XV, p. 14.

Also consider Origen's Pagan opponent, Celsus (Κελσς), and Dionysius (Διονύσιος), the Bishop of Corinth (d. circa 171 CE) who said respectively:

"Some believers, as though from a drinking bout, go so far as to oppose themselves and alter the original text of the gospel three or four or several times over, and they change its character to enable them to deny difficulties in the face of criticism."⁹⁰¹

"When my fellow-Christians invited me to write to them I did so. These the devil's apostles have filled with tares, taking away some things and adding others. For them the woe is reserved. Small wonder then if some have dared to tamper even with the word of the Lord himself, when they have conspired to mutilate my own humble efforts."⁹⁰²

Contemporary scholar Rothschild says:

"Although most are minor, some errors, or 'variants,' intentionally altered the meaning of the texts. Scribes or copyists deliberately added or subtracted from the text, for example, to conform a passage to later Christian doctrine or to defend a scribe or other group against opponents" (emphasis mine).⁹⁰³

Finally, the Qur'an says:

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ

"Woe to those who write the Bible (الكتاب) with their right hands then say, 'This is from God,' in order to make a paltry gain therefrom; Woe to them for what their hands write! And woe to them for what they gain!" (Q 2:79)

The historical critical method (HCM) has a difficult time finding a place in the hearts of many contemporary graduate students in Western Academy. And I must admit that at times, engaging in cutting-edge literary criticism, whether it be feminist, queer, post-colonial, or Muslim hermeneutics of the biblical text, simply seem to be much more relevant, needed, and just plain more exciting due to our present world conditions. I also

⁹⁰¹ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 52; cf. *Against Celsus* 2.27.

⁹⁰² *ibid*, 53. Ehrman does not provide a source document.

⁹⁰³ Clare Rothschild, "Historical Criticism," in *Methods for Luke*, ed. Joel B. Green, 10.

believe, however, that there are elements of the HCM that will always remain indispensably and inextricably bound up with the various literary and interpretive methodologies whether we admit it or not. Textual criticism, for example, with all of its tedious sifting through thousands of manuscripts and its weighing of external and internal evidences, *must* be done for the simple reason that if a text of the New Testament has not been established, then there would be nothing for the literary critics to read! As eminent New Testament textual critic Metzger mentioned, however, textual criticism is not merely a science, but an art, and the inevitable divergence of scholarly opinions and evaluations regarding the significance of the evidences that arise from this art demonstrate its subjective and ultimately “edgy” nature. At the end of that tedious and laborious process of searching, collating, and weighing manuscript after manuscript the textual critic is then expected to make a decision as to what was penned by the original author of the document. Indeed, there are general rules that are utilized such as *lectio difficilior probabilior* and *lectior brevior est lectio potior*, but as Weissenrieder argues, these “rules cannot be used mechanically” and there are always exceptions. It is a working and dynamic text – *a living text*, that is never definitive but constantly changing due to new archeological evidence and discoveries. In many cases, such new evidences not only alter and amend the Greek text in its physical appearance, but perhaps more importantly, exercise potential influence over its interpretations. For SMBs that engage this method, the fact that the New Testament is a “living text” immediately disqualifies it as being a revealed text.

Therefore, textual criticism requires rigorous scholarship and a vast historical consciousness. It is not simply an issue of “divining,” or intuitively leaping into the mind

of the original author as Schleiermacher maintained, but rather involves the practice of “fusing our horizons” with the world of the text in order to begin an ongoing dialogical relationship. The textual critic cannot simply pick and choose what he wants to use with no apparent explanation for his choices, but must blend his vital *forestructure*, to use Gadamer’s word, with the mind of the author (or scribe), the latter only being known through intense research, not divination. Therefore, I take strong exception to those who would broadly label this art as unexciting, for what can be more exciting than essentially *writing* the New Testament? Let us examine, by looking at external and internal evidence, what I consider to be the three most significant alternative/variant readings in the Book of Signs so that we might establish our text before we attempt to analyze “pre-John” tensions and traditions that led to the composition of the Gospel.

The Prologue... A Later Addition?

Bart Ehrman suggests that the Prologue of John’s Gospel may be a later addition,⁹⁰⁴ in fact, penned by the author of 1 John, “the Elder,” who modeled the first eighteen verses of John 1 after his own Prologue (1 John 1:1-10). Such a suggestion is welcomed by SMBs due to the Prologue’s “exaggerated” Christology and the fact that the Hymn to the Logos (apparently) refers to Jesus as “God” twice, at the two ends of the Hymn (John 1:1, 18). They would contend that just as the only explicit verse describing the Trinity was removed from the New Testament, the *Johannine Comma* (1 John 1 5:7),⁹⁰⁵ the only two verses that call Jesus (or the Word) “God” (John 1:1.9; John 1:18.5)

⁹⁰⁴ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 61-62.

⁹⁰⁵ In the Textus Receptus: ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ πατήρ, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσιν (1 John 5:7). This was an extremely important verse for Augustine which he found in the fourth-century Latin textual tradition. Toom says: “Augustine was even unhappy in voicing

are likewise fabrications to the text. Looking at what Metzger refers to as “external evidence,” however, we find that Ehrman’s suggestion is not supported in the least. *None* of the Greek MSS that contain John 1 are devoid of the Prologue (John 1:1-18). With respect to “internal evidence,” or “intrinsic probabilities” to be more precise, which analyzes “the style and vocabulary of the author,”⁹⁰⁶ Ehrman makes an interesting point however. Below is the Prologue of 1 John (1:1-10):

(1) That which was from the beginning (ἀρχῆς), which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have experienced (ἐθεασάμεθα) and our hands have touched concerning the Word (λόγου) of life (ζωῆς) - **(2)** And the life (ζωή) was manifested, and we have both seen (ἐωράκαμεν) and (now) witness (μαρτυροῦμεν) (to it), and we announce to you the eternal life which was with the Father and manifested to us. **(3)** That which we have seen and heard, we also announce to you, so that you might have fellowship with us. And *our* fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. **(4)** And these things we write, so that our joy might be fulfilled.

(5) And this is the message that we have heard from him (Jesus) and announce to you, that God is light (φῶς), and in Him there is no darkness (σκοτία) at all. **(6)** If we say that we have fellowship with Him, yet walk in the darkness (σκοτέι), then we are lying, and do not do the truth (ἀλήθειαν). **(7)** But if we walk in the light (φωτὶ), as he is in the light (φωτὶ), then we have fellowship with one another; and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. **(8)** If we say that we don’t have sin, then we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth (ἀλήθεια) is not in us (ἐν ἡμῖν). **(9)** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, so that He might forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all iniquity. **(10)** If we say that we have not sinned, then we make him a liar, and His word (λόγος) is not in us (ἐν ἡμῖν).

<u>Vocabulary</u>	<u>Prologue of Gospel</u>	<u>Prologue of Epistle</u>
“beginning” (ἀρχῆς)	1:1	1:1
“experienced” (ἐθεασάμεθα)	1:14	1:1
“word” (λόγος)	1:1, 14	1:1 10
“life” (ζωή)	1:4	1:1, 2
“saw” (ἐωράκαμεν)	1:18	1:2
“witnessed” (μαρτυροῦμεν)	1:7, 8	1:2

the phrase ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,’ because the words proceeded in a temporal sequence and could not be said simultaneously (Trin. 4.5.30).” Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 118.

⁹⁰⁶ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 14.

“light” (φῶς)	1:4, 5, 8, 9	1:5, 7
“darkness” (σκοτία)	1:5	1:5, 6
“truth” (ἀλήθεια)	1:9, 14, 17	1:5, 8
“in/among us: (ἐν ἡμῖν)	1:14	1:8, 10

When comparing the two Prologues, we notice that much of the vocabulary is the same as well as that they exhibit similar styles. The crucial question is, however, which Prologue came first? If we entertain Ehrman’s suggestion that John 1 was written later by the author of 1 John, and we were to consider “transcriptional probabilities,” it would lead us to ask: Why did the Elder find it necessary to write the Prologue of John’s Gospel? It seems as though he wanted to elevate the status of Christ in the *Gospel* in order to reflect Christ’s status in the Johannine *community*. But perhaps more importantly, the Prologue may have been penned in order to provide an element of the Johannine community with a clear proof-text against another element of the *same* community who came to adopt what the former would consider heretical Christological beliefs. Under this theory, the latter element of the community broke away theologically from the former, representing the majority, by denying that Jesus was “in the flesh.” These secessionists, who may be dubbed proto-Gnostics or early Docetists, maintained that Jesus was a purely *spiritual* being - there was nothing fleshy (“*sarxian*”) about him. It is indeed a historical fact that the Gospel of John was used in Gnostic circles, and that the first commentary ever written on John is attributed to a second-century Valentinian Gnostic named Heracleon.⁹⁰⁷ In fact, some early scholars maintained that the Gospel itself was written by a Gnostic

⁹⁰⁷ Stephen L. Harris, *The New Testament, A Student’s Introduction* (Mountain View: Mayfield, 1999), 19; Cf. D. Jeffrey Bingham “Christianizing Divine Aseity,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 5; E. H. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis* (SBLDS 14; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989). Bingham also recommends Nagel, calling it “a comprehensive accounting of the appropriation and interpretation of John’s Gospel in Christian and Gnostic literature before Irenaeus” (Bingham, *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, 53); Titus Nagel, *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums in 2. Jahrhundert* (ABG 2; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000).

teacher named Cerinthus. Kasemann maintains that John *was* indeed a gnostic gospel where Jesus never totally becomes *vere homo*,⁹⁰⁸ but eventually assimilated by the proto-orthodox after being championed by Irenaeus and Clement. Thus the Elder, who is perhaps the same person as Bultmann's "Ecclesiastical Redactor,"⁹⁰⁹ wrote the Prologue in order to state unequivocally: "And the word became *flesh* (σάρξ, *sarx*) and dwelled among us" (John 1:14.1). Christ was literal flesh and blood, not some phantasm. When we analyze 1 John, we notice that the author mentions two "anti-Christic" threats to the Johannine community: 1) Jews: Those who deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:18-25); 2) Proto-Gnostics/Docetae or *Antisarxian* heretics: Those who deny that Jesus has "come in the flesh" (ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα) (1 John 4:1-3). Thus the composition of the Prologue, presumably by the Elder, supports not only Jesus' "deity," but also his literal humanity.

My Ruling

The suggestion that the author of 1 John wrote the Prologue of the Gospel is just one theory out of many and raises a plethora of difficult questions. Perhaps the Elder is also the author of the *entire* Gospel? Perhaps the author of 1 John intended *his* Prologue to mimic the Hymn to the Logos? This would explain the similar terminology. If proto-Gnostics eventually seceded from the young Johannine community with the Gospel devoid of the Prologue, why is there *no manuscript evidence* supporting this "original"

⁹⁰⁸ See: Ernst Kasemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (London: SCM, 1968).

⁹⁰⁹ See: Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971). Anderson says about this commentary: "[It] stands out as the most important piece of biblical scholarship in the twentieth century precisely because it dealt so thoroughly with the epistemological origins of John's christological tensions." Paul N. Anderson, "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John's Christological Tensions," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 317.

Gospel of John? In fact, the earliest complete (or nearly complete) MSS of the Gospel of John's Book of Signs, the *Alexandrian* Bodmer Papyri P66 and P75, dated prior to 150 CE and around 200 CE respectively by Karl Jaros, do in fact contain the Prologue.⁹¹⁰ If the Johannine Prologue was a proto-orthodox addition to John, why don't the early proto-orthodox fathers state anywhere that Gnostics, such as the Valentinians or possibly Marcionites, rejected it? Contra Kasemann, I agree with Meeks,⁹¹¹ Borgen,⁹¹² and Anderson, the latter of whom says: "Far more convincing than inferring the Gnostic Redeemer-Myth as the origin of the descent and ascent of the Johannine Jesus as the Revealer from God is the *Jewish agency typology, rooted in Deuteronomy 18*,⁹¹³ the Jewish *Shaliach* principle."⁹¹⁴ Suggesting the Prologue to be a later addition also fails to notice the symmetrical structure of the Gospel, contra Ehrman who describes the Prologue as not "cohering" to the rest of the Gospel.⁹¹⁵ At the end of the Book of Signs, and thus the end of Jesus' public ministry, the author makes crucial allusions to the Prologue that highlight the teaching of Christ situated in the middle chapters. For example: In John 1:18, we are told that Christ is "in the bosom of the Father" (εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς), meaning beloved by God, and by 12:26, those who follow Jesus will be "where he is" - also beloved. Additionally, in John 1:12, the evangelist tells us that

⁹¹⁰ Manuscripts P05 and P106 (both generally dated to the third-century CE) only contain John 1:33-40; 16:14-22, 22-30 and John 1:29-35; 40-46 respectively and are thus lacking the Prologue. However, these manuscript are (obviously) gravely fragmentary and do not fall under my description of "nearly complete." See: Karl Jaros, *Die ältesten griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments Bearbeitete Edition und Übersetzung* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2014).

⁹¹¹ See: Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967).

⁹¹² See: Peder Borgen, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Interpretation of John*, 2nd ed., ed. John Ashton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 83-95.

⁹¹³ Paul N. Anderson, "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John's Christological Tensions," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 324.

⁹¹⁴ *ibid*, 322. Judaism is also the origin of the descending/ascending Johannine Son of Man motif. See Francis J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*, 2nd. Ed. (BSR 14; Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1978).

⁹¹⁵ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 61.

Christ gave people authority to be “children of God,” and by 12:36 (his final imperative in public), he says: “Believe in the light, so that you might become sons of the light.”⁹¹⁶ Furthermore, without the Prologue, the Gospel of John would begin quite awkwardly with the conjunction καί in the verse: “And this is the witness of Yahya, when the Jews from Jerusalem...” (John 1:19.1). This usage of καί very likely indicates the presence of a preceding text, and no other book of the New Testament, let alone another Gospel, begins with the word καί. Anderson contends: “The Gospel needs the Prologue, but the Prologue also needs the Gospel. Either without the other is incomplete.”⁹¹⁷ For all of these reasons, my ruling is that the Prologue of the Gospel of John was written by the autograph author of John and was not a later addition for Christological reasons. Even Bultmann states: “The relationship between 1 John and the Gospel rests on the fact that the author of 1 John had the Gospel before him and was decisively influenced by its language and ideas.”⁹¹⁸

The Conundrum of the Standard Muslim Biblicists (SMBs)

From a confessional perspective, the SMB must think twice about rejecting the Prologue and deeming it a fabrication to the Gospel. As I stated earlier, the Qur’an’s designation for Jesus as the “Word of God” (كلمة الله) is found in *John*, and no other

⁹¹⁶ See: John A. T. Robinson, “The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of John,” in *Twelve More New Testament Studies* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 65-76. See chapter four of this present work under the title “John 3:16: ‘Son’” for an analysis of τέκνα and υἱοί as they are used respectively in John 1:12 and 12:36.

⁹¹⁷ Paul N. Anderson, “On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John’s Christological Tensions,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 329-330. Also see: Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist* (JSNTSup 107; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 9-25; R. Alan Culpepper, “The Pivot of John’s Prologue,” *NTS* 27 (1980): 1-31.

⁹¹⁸ Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles (Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible)* (Fortress Press, 1973), 1.

canonical Christian book. The Qur'an is confirming this title for Jesus and even makes, what I consider to be, an obvious allusion or perhaps a paraphrase of a statement from the Prologue concerning the role of John the Baptist (John 1:8; Q 3:39). If the Prologue is a later addition to John motivated by polemical considerations, then what are the implications of the Qur'an confirming, or drawing from a fabricated text? SMBm, however, necessitates the rejection of the Prologue because Christ is (apparently) identified as God. Perhaps the Qur'an is rather confirming a different version of the Prologue? A version in which Jesus is *not* called God? As we shall see, there *is* manuscript evidence of this suggestion, but I do not believe that it significantly helps the standard Muslim case. Thus the methodology of the SMB leaves him at an impasse; he must reject a text that is affirmed in the Qur'an for theological reasons! I believe that the answer lies in *affirming* the text of the Prologue, as the Qur'an does, but critically engaging the *meaning* of the text to determine whether *in fact* Christ is being identified as *the* God. This is the Ghazalian textually-affirming approach that I utilized in the preceding chapters of the present work. With respect to the Prologue, as I stated, there are two ways in which we may understand the text that is perfectly in line with normative Sunni theo-mystical tradition: 1) The Primordial/Pretemporal Messianic Light: The Logos as personal and created; 2) The Pre-Eternal Messianic Decree: The Logos as impersonal and uncreated. With this approach, Christ is never quite God yet the Prologue is affirmed as the *Injil*. However, this approach necessitates rigorous scholarship in New Testament studies as well as in Greek. Unfortunately, SMBm does not usually encourage this level of study thus the Christian Scriptures are rarely examined beyond superficial interpretations. It is my contention that Muslim scholars must engage the Gospel of John

with the same level of “penetrating analysis” (تدبر), that the Qur’an demands (Q 4:82) with respect to itself. Even the extremely learned lecturer of the prestigious Ummul Qurrah in Mecca, Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali al-Sabuni (b. 1930 CE), a man who has decades of Islamic scholarship under his belt, refers to the Gospel of Barnabas as “the most authentic and truthful of all the Gospels,”⁹¹⁹ contends that the word *Injil* is “Hebrew,”⁹²⁰ and that “Jesus” means “the sincere” in “Hebrew.”⁹²¹ Al-Sabuni also maintains that the Gospel of John was written in the “second-century by a student in the school of Alexandria.”⁹²² If we were to continue to translate الكتاب as “the Bible,” when the context is concerning *Ahl al-Kitab*, then the Qur’an is indeed chastising those who import their deficient and superficial understandings upon the text of the Bible: “And from them (*Ahl al-Kitab* [and Muslims by extension]) are unlearned ones who do not know the Bible except what they heard; they do nothing but conjecture” (Q 2:78); or in another *ayah*: “... Be lordly/divinized! - Because you have been teaching and studying *the Bible (al-Kitab)*” (Q 3:79.1).

John 1:18: A Variant Reading... Unique Son or Unique God?

Let us now examine the second most significant variant reading in the Book of Signs so that we might establish our text before we attempt to analyze “pre-John” traditions that led to the composition of the Gospel. The text in question is the ultimate verse of the Prologue, John 1:18, in which we are told that Jesus is either “a unique Son”

⁹¹⁹ al-Sabuni, *Al-Nabuwwa wa'l Anbiya*, ' trans. by Muhammad Idris Esau under the title *Prophethood and the Prophets*, 212.

⁹²⁰ *ibid*, 211-212.

⁹²¹ *ibid*, 194.

⁹²² *ibid*, 214.

(μονογενὴς υἱός) or “a unique god/God” (μονογενὴς θεός), hence the alternate version of the Prologue that I mentioned earlier. SMBs, taking cue from their remedial understandings of Ehrman, Comfort, Rothschild, and Metzger, would insist that “Son,” while still “blasphemous,” must be the more ancient or original reading that was changed by later proto-orthodox scribes to “God” in order to provide a definitive proof text (دليل قطعي) of Jesus’ deity. They would insist that this is an example of textual corruption (تحريف نصي) of the New Testament and thus the Gospel of John is disqualified as being the true *Injil* since, “there is no changer of His words” (Q 6:115.9). Therefore, the *Injil*-Archetype, although lost, is the true *Injil*.

Several English translations (NIV, HCSB, RSV, YLT, DBY, WEB, HNV) including the celebrated KJV/NKJV as well as the Latin Vulgate and Greek *Textus Receptus* read “Son/υἱός,” “Son/*Filius*.” However, the *Textus Receptus* of Bonaventura and Elzevir (1633) as well as *all* Greek New Testament editions produced after Gutenberg’s printing press were based on highly corrupted Byzantine MSS⁹²³ until the emergence of von Tischendorf (1869-72) and Westcott and Hort (1881) whose critical editions make use of much more ancient Alexandrian⁹²⁴ witnesses. Thus the Greek MSS that preserve the “Son/υἱός” reading tend to be either Byzantine uncials (majuscules) or *later* Alexandrian/Byzantine minuscules. The MSS that preserve “Son” are: A, C³, K, X, Δ, Θ, Π, 063, 0234, f¹, f¹³, 28, 565, 700, 892, 1009, 1010, 1071, 1079, 1195, 1216, 1230, 1241, 1242, 1253, 1344, 1365, 1546, 1646, 2148. The famous KJV of 1611, also called the “Authorized Version,” was based largely upon the editions of Theodore Beza (1588-

⁹²³ Byzantine also called: Syrian text (Westcott & Hort); Koine text (von Soden); Ecclesiastical text (Lake); Antiochian (Ropes). Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 7.

⁹²⁴ The Alexandrian text-type is called the “Neutral Text” by Westcott and Hort.

89, 1598) and William Tyndale's English translation (1525). The latter used the Greek New Testament of Desiderius Erasmus (1516) as his basis. However, both Erasmus and Beza derived their Greek texts from very late (medieval) and highly adulterated/corrupted Byzantine MSS; MSS that sought to "smooth away any harshness of language, to combine two or more divergent readings into one expanded reading (called conflation), and to harmonize divergent parallel passages."⁹²⁵ In the twentieth century, however, the discovery of four invaluable Alexandrian MSS in Egypt settled the question as to which reading, $\nu\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$ or $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$, was the more ancient. Two of these MSS are massive uncial codices written on parchment that date to the early-mid fourth century, while the other two are much more fragile uncial MSS written on papyrus that date to around 150-200 CE, according to modern scholarship. The former are classified as $\aleph$ and B, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, respectively, while the latter are called P (papyrus) 66 and P75, according to the numbering of Gregory-Aland. According to Metzger, these four MSS were taken as the basis for the United Bible Societies' critical text of the Gospel of John.⁹²⁶ These Alexandrian texts are usually considered to be the best texts of the New Testament and "most faithful in preserving the original."⁹²⁷ Thus while Codex B (Vaticanus) and P75 are separated by about 200 years, their texts are virtually identical. Below I have reproduced the actual texts of the Codex Sinaiticus ($\aleph$), Codex Vaticanus (B), P66, and P75 as they appear line by line in these respective manuscripts.

⁹²⁵ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 7.

⁹²⁶ *ibid*, 10.

⁹²⁷ *ibid*, 5.

**Original uncial of Codex Sinaiticus (Σ)
in *scriptua continua***

ΘΝΟΥΔΕΙCΕΩΡΑ
ΚΕΝΠΩΠΟΤΕΜΟ
ΝΟΓΕΝΗCΘCΕΙCΤΟ
ΚΟΛΠΟΝΤΟΥΠΑ
ΤΡΟCΕΚΕΙΝΟCΕΞΗ
ΓΗCΑΤΟ

Text written with spaces in minuscule

Θν ουδεις εωρα
κεν πωποτε μο
νογενης Θς εις το
κολπον του πα
τρος εκεινος εξη
γησατο

**Original uncial of Codex Vaticanus (B)
in *scriptua continua***

ΘΝΟΥΔΕΙCΕΟ
ΡΑΚΕΝΠΩΠΟΤΕΜΟΝΟ
ΓΕΝΗCΘCΩΝΕΙCΤΟΝ
ΚΟΛΠΟΝΤΟΥΠΑΤΡΟC
ΕΚΕΙΝΟCΕΞΗΓΗCΑΤΟ

Text written with spaces in minuscule

Θν ουδεις εο
ρακεν πωποτε μονο
γενης Θς ο ων εις τον
κολπον του πατρος
εκεινος εξηγησατο

**Original uncial of Bodmer P66
in minuscule
in *scriptua continua***

ΘΝΟΥΔΕΙCΕΩΡΑΚΕΝΠΩΠΟΤΑΙΜΟ
ΝΟΓΕΝΗCΘCΩΝΕΙCΤΟΝΚΟΛΠΟΝΤ
ΠΡCΕΚΙΝΟCΕΞΗΓΗCΑΤΟ

Text written with spaces in

Θν ουδεις εωρακεν πωποται μο
νογενης Θς ο ων εις τον κολπον τ
πρς εκινος εξηγησατο

**Original uncial of Bodmer P75
in minuscule
in *scriptua continua***

ΘΝΟΥΔΕΙCΠΩΠΟΤΕΕΟ
ΡΑΚΕΝΟΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗCΘCΩΝΕΙCΤΟΝΚΟΛ
ΠΟΝΤΟΥΠΑΤΡΟCΕΚΕΙΝΟCΕΞΗΓΗCΑΤΟ

Text written with spaces in

Θν ουδεις πωποτε εο
ρακεν ο μονογενες Θς ο ων εις τον κολ
πον του πατρος εκεινος εξηγησατο

My Ruling

All four MSS above describe Christ as μονογενής θεός with θεός written as the *nomen sacrum*.⁹²⁸ Θς. P75 places the article before μονογενής thus rendering the phrase, “the unique god,” although Metzger and the UBS do not believe that the article is

⁹²⁸ This is the expression of Ludwig Traube. See: Bruce Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1891), 36.

authentic.⁹²⁹ I agree with the Committee that μονογενής θεός is the more ancient reading (as opposed to μονογενής υἱός) and therefore what I believe the autograph author actually wrote. I also agree with Metzger that θεός was changed to υἱός as a “result of scribal assimilation” to John 3:16, 18,⁹³⁰ because while calling Jesus “God” does not “cut against the grain” of what many proto-orthodox elements would have wanted to say about Jesus,⁹³¹ qualifying θεός with the adjective μονογενής makes it the more “difficult reading” (*lectio difficilior*) and thus more likely authentic according to the principle of Westcott and Hort. On another point, the fact that scribes wrote θεός as a *nomen sacrum* certainly does not necessarily imply that they meant “God” and not “god” i.e. a divinized creature who speaks with God’s authority and reflects His attributes *or* simply as an entity with extraordinary abilities as in 2 Cor 4:4.5 where Paul calls Satan “god” with *theos* written as a *nomen sacrum* (ΘC) by a scribe in the Codex Sinaiticus. Metzger demonstrates that while ancient scribes considered words like God/god, Lord/lord, Jesus, Christ, Son, Spirit, as indeed being *nomina sacra*, also included were David, cross, mother, Israel, human, Jerusalem, and heaven.⁹³² Thus for an SMB to suggest that the Qur’an affirms the Johannine Prologue because the original version of it describes Jesus as “Son” and not “God” is highly problematic for a number of reasons: 1) The Qur’an condemns the Trinitarian Christian belief that Jesus is the “Son of God” as well as “God;” “Son” in both the sense of “*walad*” and “*Ibn*,” the former perhaps denoting the belief in a *literal homoousion* begetting and the latter denoting the *claim* of the Trinitarians that

⁹²⁹ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 169-170.

⁹³⁰ *ibid*, 169.

⁹³¹ As mentioned in chapter one, it was the commentaries and writings of the Patristics that led to the full literal deification of Christ at Nicea in 325 CE.

⁹³² Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible*, 36-37.

Christ's sonship is to be understood as pure metaphor - "This is what they claim with their mouths" (Q 9:30.5) in order to perhaps placate the Muslims, yet they *internally* harbor belief in his literal, meaning pre-eternal, "begottenness." The SMBs would have to be willing to entertain the notion that Jesus is the "Son of God" in a highly nuanced Judaically-situated way. 2) The overwhelming MSS evidence suggests that the authentic version of the Prologue's John 1:18 read θεός and not υἱός; 3) Therefore, the Qur'an would be affirming a text that was *fabricated by scribes*. But what does it mean for Jesus to be μονογενής θεός? As I stated earlier in my exegesis of John 1, "gods" (anarthrous) in the Bible are those who represent God (*ho theos*) and speak with His authority; Jesus is called "unique god" (divinized creation/ perfected agent/ "theomorphic" reflection) because he is distinctively divinized, the perfect human mirror (مראה) of God's attributes (صفات) whose teachings make it possible for believers in God (*ho theos*) to become "gods" as well. Christ is "god" as Philo described Moses to be;⁹³³ as one who has achieved mystical union with the Deity, but also possibly one who had fellowship with God pre-somatically. Two hundred years after Philo, in the very city of Alexandria, the incredible Origen (d. 254 CE) spoke of Christ as coming into being (created) by the Father and existing as a disembodied mind along with other minds, in unitive bliss and *doxa* with God. While other minds either wavered or rebelled against God, one mind remained steadfast and in perfect obedience and adoration, it was the mind of Christ. While Origen eventually contends that Christ became the Word (Λόγος) of God and thus somehow equal in substance to God,⁹³⁴ Christ was, in Ehrman's words, only "equal with God by the *transference* of God's being; ultimately, he is subordinate to God and is 'less

⁹³³ Cf. Philo of Alexandria, *Life of Moses*

⁹³⁴ *On First Principles*, 2:6.

than the Father' (*On First Principles* 1:3)."⁹³⁵ From my perspective, Origen went a bit too far; from the perspective of the proto-orthodox at Nicea, he did not go far enough, and was eventually anathematized at Constantinople II (553 CE) due to his subordinationism.

The Pericope Adulterae

The final variant reading in the Book of Signs that deserves our attention is the famous *pericope adulterae* of John 7:53-8:11. When looking at the external evidence, this passage is missing from such "early and diverse manuscripts" as: P66, P75, 8, B, L, N, T, W, X, Y, Δ, Θ, Ψ, 0141, 0211, 22, 33, 124, 157, 209, 788, 828, 1230, 1241, 1242, 1253, 2193.⁹³⁶ Ferrar's Family 13 minuscule MSS, dated to the eleventh and fifteenth centuries CE, place the passage after Luke 21:25, and while Latin Fathers Ambrose (d. 397 CE) and Augustine (d. 430 CE) referenced the pericope,⁹³⁷ no Greek Father comments on it prior to Euthymius Zigabenus in the twelfth-century CE.⁹³⁸ As far as internal evidence (intrinsic probabilities) is concerned, Ehrman, Metzger, and Parker, among many others, conclude that the style and vocabulary are atypical of John and seem to be more characteristic of Luke(-Acts),⁹³⁹ hence its placement in f13. The following are a few examples of *hapax legomenoi* used in the *pericope adulterae*, most of which are actually found in Luke-Acts: 1) "scribe" (γραμματεὺς): used fifteen times in Luke and four times in Acts, while only once in John (8:3); 2) "stooped down" (κύπτω): used twice in the "Johannine" *pericope adulterae* (John 8:6, 8) and nowhere else in John; 3) "make as

⁹³⁵ Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, 155.

⁹³⁶ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 187.

⁹³⁷ D.C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 343.

⁹³⁸ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 188.

⁹³⁹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 336.

though” (προσποιέω): used in Luke 24:28 and John 8:6; 4) “lift himself up” (ἀνακύπτω): used in Luke 13:11; 21:28 and John 8:7, 10; 5) “conscience” (συνείδησις): used in Acts 23:1; 24:16 and John 8:9; 6) “elder” (πρεσβύτερος): used five times by Luke and eighteen times in Acts, while only once in John (8:9). Thus I agree with the vast majority of Johannine commentators that the language is clearly Lukan. But why would a later scribe add the passage... and to John? To answer this question, we would need to further investigate the internal evidence (transcriptional probabilities). In my view, the passage was added by later proto-orthodox scribes in order to justify their pro-Pauline, antinomian stance with regards to the *mitzvot* of the Torah and to further distance themselves from their mother faith (Judaism), and given the unparalleled Christological influence of the Gospel of John across early proto-orthodox Christian communities, the placement of such an apparently antinomian pericope in John would ensure its rapid and widespread dissemination.

My Ruling

The “mobile” aspect of the *pericope adulterae*, that is to say, its appearance in different Gospels, and even in different places (after Luke 21:25, 21:38; John 7:52) further proves the passage’s later invention.⁹⁴⁰ For this reason, and those mentioned above, I do not believe that the passage originated with the autograph author of the

⁹⁴⁰ For discussion about the authenticity of the pericope adulterae see: Johnson, A. F., “A Stylistic Trait of the Fourth Gospel in the *Pericope Adulterae*?” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9 (1966): 91-96; Hodges, Z. C., “The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11): Exposition,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980): 41-53; Hodges, Z. C., “The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11): The Text,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (1979): 318-32; Derrett, J. D. M., “Law in the New Testament: The Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery,” *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963/64): 1-26; Coleman, B. W., “The Woman Taken in Adultery. Studies in Texts: John 7:53-8:11,” *Theology* 73 (1970): 409-10. To examine patristic use of the pericope see: Bart D. Ehrman, *New Testament Studies*, xxxiv (1988), 24-44.

Gospel of John. Therefore, with respect to the three significant alternate/variant readings mentioned above, the Prologue, John 1:18, and John 7:53-8:11, I am in agreement with the decisions of the United Bible Society's 4th ed., and believe that their critical edition represents the most accurate rendering of the Greek text of John. It is interesting to note that due to the pericope's "evident antiquity,"⁹⁴¹ the United Bible Society (4th ed.) as well as Nestle-Aland (27th ed.) decided to include the passage in their respective critical editions, albeit in double-brackets, despite both organizations deeming the passage a later insertion. Perhaps their decision was also influenced by the pericope's sacred place in the hearts of the faithful, especially Christ's iconic pronouncement: "He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone" (ὁ ἀναμάρτητος ὑμῶν πρῶτος ἐπ' αὐτὴν βαλέτω λίθον [John 8:7.9]). The celebrated nature of the passage is further demonstrated among Trinitarian Christians (the forerunners of whom were the proto-orthodox) by its consistent depiction in films about Jesus, from *The King of Kings* to *Jesus of Nazareth* to *The Passion of the Christ* to the History Channel's *The Bible*, the iconic scene showing Jesus coming to the rescue of a woman caught in the act of adultery seems almost obligatory. Interestingly, there exists a minority opinion that the passage is actually authentic but was expunged by later scribes because, as Augustine had once suggested, it was feared that women might decide that it gave them "carte blanche."⁹⁴²

But even if the passage were authentic, I do not necessarily conclude that Jesus was somehow revoking the Torah with his saving actions, but quite to the contrary, he was demonstrating to the Pharisees that he did in fact keep the Law, while *they* were in violation of it! The Written Law (*Torah she 'al ketav*; Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22) orders the

⁹⁴¹ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 189.

⁹⁴² Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts*, 343.

death of the adulteress *and* the adulterer. However, if a woman alone was suspected of adultery, she must undergo a process known as “the ordeal of bitter waters” described in Numbers 5:11-31, with further details given in the *Mishnah* (*Seder Nashim*) of the Oral Law (*Torah she ‘al peh*). The accused woman (called *Sotah*) who continued to maintain her innocence would be taken to the East Gate of the Temple where a priest of the Sanhedrin would administer the ceremony by using the dust of the Tabernacle to write her crime on a parchment which was then blotted out with water that she would subsequently drink. The priest would then order her to take the “oath of purgation” while her “jealousy offering” was offered upon the altar. If her belly should swell, then she was found guilty. However Akiva says: “Only when the man is himself free from guilt, will the waters be an effective test of his wife’s guilt or innocence; but if he has been guilty of illicit intercourse, the waters will have no effect.”⁹⁴³ Therefore, in order to demonstrate to the Pharisees not only his knowledge of the Oral Law, which could only be known by rabbinical transmissional training, or in this case, *directly from God*, as well as to point out the Pharisees’ hypocrisy, Jesus stoops down and writes the names of the accusers in the dust! The fact that the Pharisees decided to give a free pass to the male participant in the forbidden act is in and of itself a violation of the Law. Perhaps it was one of them who was caught with the woman! In order to get a legal conviction for adultery, all requisites must be met, otherwise the accusers must be put to shame. To put it Qur’anicallly: “Those who levy the charge (of adultery) against women, but do not produce four witnesses (to the actual *penetration*), flog them with eighty lashes! And do not accept their testimony after that - they are unjust sinners (الْفَاسِقُونَ)” (Q 24:4). Jesus’

⁹⁴³ *Sifre*, *Naso*, 21; *Sotah*, 47b.

actions seem to have been predicted by Jeremiah who said: “O Lord, the Hope of Israel! All who forsake you shall be ashamed, and all who abandon you *shall be written on the earth*; for they have forsaken *the fountain of living waters* (מַיִם-חַיִּים), the Lord” (Jer. 17:13)! Jesus Christ is the living water (John 4:10-11; 7:38) and the *Adonai* (the Father) is the fountain.

Other Minor Variant Readings of John and their Significance for the SMBs

Thus far, we have established that there were *attempts* among early proto-orthodox scribes to fabricate (تحريف) the Gospel of John with textual aberrations in order to champion their own Christological positions as well as to smooth out or harmonize difficult passages. However, this practice was known and condemned by the likes of Irenaeus, Origen, and Dionysius, and even the Qur’an (2:79: “Woe to those who write the Bible with their own hands...), quoted above. However, the *Injil* was “sent down” (أنزل) by God (3:3.9) and there can be “no changer of God’s words” (6:115.9). SMBs therefore disqualify the Gospel of John as being the *Injil* because it was “corrupted” by later scribes, while I argue that the Gospel of John is in fact the *Injil* and thus *cannot* be corrupted, although *attempts* were made. The Qur’anic statement, “There can be no changer of God’s words,” does not make it physically impossible for someone to add or remove verses from a printed or hand-written version of the Gospel or Qur’an and pass it off as the actual Gospel or Qur’an, but rather means that although human beings may try to change things, the truth will eventually manifest. SMBs may be shocked to discover that a major attempt to corrupt the Qur’an was made just a few years ago. In 1989, an Egyptian-American biochemist named Rashad Khalifa and founder of a “Qur’an-only”

(قرانيون) group calling itself “United Submitters International,” began printing copies of his translation and commentary of the Qur’an called *Qur’an: The Final Testament, Authorized English Version*⁹⁴⁴ in which he removed the last two *ayahs* of *Surah al-Tawbah* (Q 9:128-129) in the English and *Arabic*, citing that they were later additions to the text that in fact deify the Prophet Muhammad. *Thousands upon thousands* of people today living in several different countries continue to believe that Khalifa was the final “Messenger” (رسول) and that his version of the Qur’an is the very Qur’an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. My questions to the SMBs are: How is this any different than what happened to the New Testament, specifically the Gospel of John? Would you consider this to be “*tahrif*” of the Qur’an motivated by theological polemics? Did the “words of God” change?

Bruce Metzger lists in his *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2 ed.) approximately 116 additional variant readings in the Gospel of John’s Book of Signs (in addition to John 1:18 and 7:53-8:11).⁹⁴⁵ However, these differences are minor and do not affect the overall theo-christo-ethical message of the Gospel in the least. In fact, the vast majority of these differences are unintentional scribal errors due to *parablepsis* or due to diverse Greek spelling conventions. The heart and soul of John remains intact, preserved (محفوظ). Scriptural aberrations termed by Ehrman as “anti-Adoptionist, anti-Separationist, anti-Docetist, and anti-Patrippassianist”⁹⁴⁶ did in fact occur from time to time, but these were eventually weeded out of the text whose overall integrity remains intact to a very high degree and unmatched in the ancient world. The magnificent

⁹⁴⁴ Rashad Khalifa, *Qur’an the Final Testament: Authorized English Version with Arabic Text*, revised ed. (Universal Unity, 2000).

⁹⁴⁵ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 167-221.

⁹⁴⁶ See: Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 55-330.

discoveries of Alexandrian MSS P66, P75, Ⲙ, and B in the twentieth-century are used as the basis of the modern eclectic critical Greek text, and the fact that P66 dated 150 CE or 200 CE (Jaros⁹⁴⁷ and van Minnen respectively) and Codex B (c. 300 CE [van Minnen]) are virtually identical testifies that the textual tradition of the Gospel was much more stable than what SMBs as well as modern historical critics make it out to be. The Gospel of John is also unique in the sense that the oldest extant manuscript of *any* New Testament book is John Rylands tiny (3.5 in. X 2.5 in.) P52 containing parts of John 18:31-33 on its *recto* and vs. 37-38 on its *verso*. Although there is some debate as to its actual date, Parker, Metzger, Ehrman, and the majority of textual critics date the manuscript to the middle of the second-century, even as early as 125 CE (Hanson) or 100-115 CE (Comfort). The existence of P52 also proves that the autograph of the Gospel of John was written somewhat earlier, viz. “in the first-century.”⁹⁴⁸ And based on what we know about the Alexandrian text tradition, we can safely say that P52’s full text would not have been markedly different from P75 written a few decades later, and thus basically the same as the fourth-century’s Codex B (Vaticanus). And again, the UBS’s 4th ed. of *The Greek New Testament* edited by the Alands (Barbara and Kurt), Karavidopoulos, Martini, and Metzger is directly based upon these ancient Greek MSS, thus placing our modern Gospel of John squarely in the very century in which Jesus Christ walked the earth and in the conceivable lifespans of his Disciples. SMBs who tend to complain about the tendency of Western Orientalists to ignore or discount the Qur'an's apparently multiply-attested oral transmission, and the fact that the Qur'an was passed

⁹⁴⁷ See: Karl Jaros, *Die ältesten griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments Bearbeitete Edition und Übersetzung*.

⁹⁴⁸ See: <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/manuscripts.html>

primarily through memory from Master to student, may not have realized that the biblical text was also preserved in the hearts and minds of many early Christians who would check the written word against their own memories. With respect to the Gospel of John specifically, Metzger says:

“The requirements of memorizing portions of the Scriptures as prerequisite for ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood are specified in a Coptic ostrakon edited by *Crum*. According to the ostrakon, Samuel, Jacob, and Aaron, who applied to Bishop Abraham to be ordained as deacons, were required ‘to master the Gospel according to John and learn it by heart by the end of Pentecost and recite it.’”⁹⁴⁹

While SMBs tend to find any type of scriptural variation (in the New Testament) as “corruption” (تحريف),⁹⁵⁰ we must remember my designation of the Gospel of John (the *Injil*) as being essentially a Level III type of Revelation (*ilham* or *iha’a*) given to a Disciple (or student of a Disciple) who wrote the words of Jesus - “what he said” directly from the Father (*ipsissima verba*) and “how he spoke it” (John 12:49) indirectly from the Father (*ipsissima vox*). As the majority of the Gospel of John constitutes Level II (*wahy*) and III (*ilham*), there is no good reason why a SMB should find fault in occasional multiple or even variant readings of the Gospel. The normal everyday speech of the Prophet Muhammad is called “*wahy*” in the Qur’an (Q 53:3-4) and certainly there are multiple versions of the Prophet Muhammad’s statements found in the vast corpus of prophetic *hadith* literature, and often times these differences can have significant theological implications. A foundational (أصولي) principle of *hadith* scholarship states

⁹⁴⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 187, no. 1, citing W.E. Crum, *Coptic Ostraca from the Collections of the Egypt Exploration Fund* (London, 1902), p. 9, no. 29.

⁹⁵⁰ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 283.

that if two sound (صحيح) *hadith*⁹⁵¹ appear to contradict each other, then the *muhaddithin* must attempt to harmonize (جمع) the accounts, but if this is not possible, then one *hadith* is chosen based on a preponderance of evidence (ترجيح). Differences in wording are due to the fact that the *ahadith* are primarily *bil-ma'ana* (بالمعنى), that is to say, correct in their meanings but related by Companions (صحابه) and Followers (تابعون) *as best as they could remember*. In fact, *every single time* the Qur'an "quotes" an Israelite prophet, it is *bil-ma'ana*, as Moses, Elijah, and Jonah certainly didn't speak Arabic! In addition to this, the Qur'an itself commands Muslims to follow the Prophet (Q 3:31) and to make him a judge in all of their affairs (Q 4:65.). This fact necessitates that God preserve providentially the *agreed-upon ethos* (سنة) of the Prophet found in the *hadith* corpus, and yet there are many variants and "grades" of *hadith* according to traditional 'ulema. Similarly, there are different "grades" of the *wahy* of Jesus and *ilham* of his disciples, viz. textual-types/families, external/internal evidence, etc. The Gospel of John represents the agreed-upon *ethos* of Jesus Christ despite a few variations of its wording. Thus SMBs must be weary of a double-standard: Why is the *hadith* corpus that makes up the *Sunnah* (normative *ethos*) of the Prophet Muhammad considered *wahy* even though there are many variants among them, while the Gospel of John, which confirms the Qur'an in many places, is considered a corrupted pseudo-gospel *because of variant readings*? The answer is because SMBs believe that the Gospel of John contradicts the Qur'an. In my previous chapters, however, I problematized this assertion and demonstrated that through

⁹⁵¹ As sound *marfu'* *hadith* (tradition ascribed directly to the Prophet) contains the following elements: 1) unbroken (*muttasil*) chain (*isnad*) of narrators 2) all narrators exhibited sound outward religiosity and embraced the beliefs of proto-/Sunnites ('*adalah*) 3) all narrators were known for their intelligence and abilities to memorize (*tamm al-dabt*) 4) the *hadith* does not contain a grammatical error 5) the text (*matn*) of the *hadith* does not seem to contradict the Qur'an 6) and there is no other issue of concern ('*illah*) about the chain such as a narrator who took from another narrator but both of them resided in different countries making it difficult to imagine how they could have met.

a Sunnite theo-mystical hermeneutic, the Gospel of John emerges as the very *Injil*. Dirks, however, places himself in a near deviant position from a traditional Sunnite standpoint by asserting that, “within Islam, only the Qur’an has the status of canonical scripture,”⁹⁵² and *not* the *ahadith*, despite the consensus (*ijma’*) of Sunnite ‘*ulema* who regard the multiply-attested (*tawatur*) dicta of the Prophet Muhammad as being creedally and juristically equal to Qur’anic *ayat*. Dirks rather refers to the *ahadith* as “supplementary books of religious instruction”⁹⁵³ as well as makes an inexplicable claim that Muslims who believe that “Muhammad was the greatest or best of the prophets of Allah,” are “contrary to Islam.”⁹⁵⁴ (!) Dirks’ opinions are at odds with the *vast* majority of Muslim theologians since Muslims *began* theologizing, yet he often prefaces his opinions with “within Islam” and “Muslims maintain.”⁹⁵⁵ Furthermore, instead of conducting any type of literary analysis of the Qur’an’s text, Dirks rather analyzes the Gospels by appealing to *Formgeschichte*, and declares that only the literary forms “alleged sayings and parables of Jesus” may be considered as “actual revelation.”⁹⁵⁶ The more proper appeal here should have been to different levels of Revelation, given the fact that according to the Qur’an, God “*revealed*” (أوحى) things to the “the Disciples” (الحواريون) of Jesus (Q 5:111.1), and that according to eminent Sunnite traditionalists such as Suyuti, non-prophetic Revelation known as *ilham* (الإلهام) or *iha’a* (إيحاء) is a fact. God spoke to every Messenger in his own “language” (*lisan*, Q 14:4), and there is no reason not to maintain that part and parcel to a Messenger’s “language” are *diverse* literary forms that God

⁹⁵² Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 46.

⁹⁵³ *ibid*, 47.

⁹⁵⁴ *ibid*, 37.

⁹⁵⁵ For example: “Muslims maintain that the original book of revelation, i.e., the *Injil*, has been altered and largely lost.” Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 46. I do not maintain this.

⁹⁵⁶ *ibid*, 59-60.

utilized for the sake of His Revelation to be understood and appreciated by its initial audience. We are not in any position to impose upon God the modalities (كيفية) of His Speech.

The common retort from SMBs is that the Qur'an and *hadith* are two completely different ball games. The Qur'an, they say, is the same Qur'an everywhere and at every time - every dot, every letter. However more learned SMBs, such as al-Azami, would rather prefer to say that the text of the Qur'an is *more stable* than that of the biblical text. While (possible) copies of 'Uthman's Master Archetype (الإمام) such as the Egyptian MS (Cairo), the Medinan MS (Topkapi), and the Samarkand MS (Tashkent), show incredible cohesiveness,⁹⁵⁷ according to *Kitab al-Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadim (d. 388/998), *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* by al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505), *Kitab al-Masahif* by Ibn Abi Dawud (d. 316/928), and the work of Western Islamicist Jeffrey (d. 1959),⁹⁵⁸ the *pre-Uthmanic mushaf* (codex) of the Companion 'Abdullah b. Mas'ud (d. 33/653) was missing *Surahs* 1, 113, and 114, the arrangement of the *Surahs* was slightly different than that of the "Authorized" Uthmanic Codices (UCs), and in *Surah al-Baqarah* alone, the text differs from the UCs in 101 places.⁹⁵⁹ The "Seven Letters"⁹⁶⁰ (سبعة أحرف) account for many of these differences as it is believed that much of the *mushaf* is written in the orthographical

⁹⁵⁷ According to al-Azami, the celebrated Companion of the Prophet, Abu Darda, collated the six Uthmanic Codices including the Caliph's Master copy and concluded that, in the words of al-Azami, "the variations amount to no more than forty characters scattered throughout six Mushafs." Al-Azami gives his source as "Abu 'Ubaid, *Fada'il*, p. 330."

⁹⁵⁸ Arthur Jeffrey, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*, 1937.

⁹⁵⁹ Ahmad Von Denffer, *Ulum al-Quran, An Introduction to the Sciences of the Quran* (Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 1983), 31.

⁹⁶⁰ "The Apostle of God met Gabriel at the stones of Mira' and (the Apostle) said to Gabriel, 'I have been sent to an unlettered nation, among them are the recalcitrant old man, the elderly woman, and the youth.' He (Gabriel) said, 'Then command them to recite the Qur'an in seven modes'" (فمرهم فليقرأوا القرآن على سبعة) (أحرف) (*Hadith* of Ahmad reported by Ubayy b. Ka'b). Also: "God has permitted you to recite the Qur'an to your nation in seven modes, and whichever mode they recite, they will be correct" (*Hadith* of Muslim reported by Ubayy b. Ka'b).

conventions of the Hudhayli dialect. Dialectic considerations may also account for the occasional differences in choice of words as well as in choice of particles (حروف). For instance, in Q 2:68 Ibn Mas'ud reads: "Ask for us..." (سل لنا), while the UC reads: "Beseech for us..." (ادع لنا). The pre-Uthmanic *mushaf* of Ubay b. Ka'b (d. 29/649) also contains some interesting divergences from the UCs. It contains 102 *Surahs* in a slightly different order, contains two additional "*Surahs*" according to Noldeke⁹⁶¹ called *al-Khal'* (Separation) and *al-Hafd* (Haste), and in *Surah al-Baqarah* alone, the text differs from the UC in 93 places,⁹⁶² very often these differences are identical to that of Ibn Mas'ud. A third manuscript worth noting is known as the Yemeni Palimpsest discovered in San'a in 1972 by Puin, which contains about half of the Qur'an. The *scriptio inferior* of the manuscript, which can be dated within fifteen years of the UC, contains some minor textual variations such as the use of synonyms, as well as various spelling conventions. An example of the former is found in *Surah al-Qari'ah* 101:5 which reads: "And the mountains will become like carded wool (صوف)," while the UC uses the word عهن for "wool." Al-Azami offers a rigorously sophisticated deconstruction of the *mushaf* of Ibn Mas'ud by appealing to history, *hadith* principles, multiple-attestation (تواتر) in oral tradition, the dubious Shi'ite origins of the reports that claim these variant readings, and suggests that the *mushaf* (or even *masahif* [pl.]) was a Shi'ite forgery that emerged from the highly polemical environment of Kufa, intended to discredit the origin of the Hanafites, Ibn Mas'ud.⁹⁶³ However the existence of variant Qur'anic readings in several

⁹⁶¹ Theodore Noldeke, et al, *Geschichte des Qorans* (Leipzig: ??, 1909-38), 33-38. Also see: Von Denffer, *Ulm al-Quran, An Introduction to the Sciences of the Quran*, 30-33.

⁹⁶² Von Denffer, *Ulm al-Quran, An Introduction to the Sciences of the Quran*, 32.

⁹⁶³ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 195-208.

other seminal Muslim sources simply cannot be denied. And although Ernst says that “these MSS do not offer any *major* variations from the accepted text”⁹⁶⁴ (emphasis mine), for SMBs to claim that “every letter and dot” of the Qur’an is universally uniform is surely an untenable and misleading claim.

The Seven Letters do in fact explain away many of these differences, as I stated earlier, and SMBs will claim that the “consonantal skeleton” (رسم) of the UCs, devoid of diacritical dots (إعجام) and vowel markings (تشكيل) allows for these Letters or “Readings” (قراءات) to be “plugged into” the Qur’an. For example, in Q 2:9, the reading (قراءة) of Hafs has the verb in the Form I (يخدعون) while according to Warsh it is in Form III (يخادعون),⁹⁶⁵ with the “dagger *alif*.” In Q 3:48.1, the قراءة of Hafs has the *ayah*: “And He will teach (يعلم) him (Jesus) the (Hebrew) Bible and Wisdom,” while according to Warsh, the *ayah* says: “And We will teach (نعلم) him (Jesus) the (Hebrew) Bible and Wisdom.” The difference between “He will teach” and “We will teach” is the matter of either one dot above or two below. Other examples include: 1) Q 2:70.5 (إن البقر): Hafs reads: “*Inna’l baqara*” with a *fatha* on the *qaf*, while Ibn Mas’ud reads: “*Inna’l baqira*” with a *kasra* on the *qaf*. This difference is probably due to dialect according to Imam al-Tabari.⁹⁶⁶ 2) Q 5:6.5 (أرجلكم): One reading says: “*Arjulakum*” with a *fatha* of the *lam*, while another says: “*Arjulikum*” with a *kasra* of the *lam*. In this example, the actual case ending of the word changes from accusative to genitive, which has significant jurisprudential implications. Such a difference is difficult to explain by appealing to dialect, thus scholars such as Abu Ja’far al-Tahawi and al-Razi interpret the Seven Letters to be rather “seven types of

⁹⁶⁴ Carl Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an*, 28.

⁹⁶⁵ Ahmad Von Denffer, *Ulam al-Quran, An Introduction to the Sciences of the Quran*, 87, 182-183.

⁹⁶⁶ See: Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, trans. by Mohammad Swaleh Siddiqui, *An Approach to the Quranic Sciences* (Karachi: Darul Isha’at, 2007), 109; cf. *Tafsir Ibn Jarir al Tabari*.

variations in recital,”⁹⁶⁷ not seven dialects, and that the Qur’an was only revealed in the dialect of the Quraysh. This explains why Umar and Hisham b. Hakim each read the very same verse from *Surat’ul Furqan* with different wordings to which the Prophet responded “Like that it was revealed” (هكذا أنزلت) to each man while both men were Qurayshites.⁹⁶⁸ According to Imam al-Razi, these variations are: *nominal* (gender and/or number); *verbal* (form, tense, or person); *inflective* (in case ending); due to *synonyms* (also revealed by God to facilitate understanding); *syntactical* (sequence of words); *phonetical* (emphasis, elongation, assimilation, etc); and due to “*omissions and additions*.”⁹⁶⁹ Thus classical Sunnite authorities such as al-Suyuti, maintain that any reported reading must fulfill three requisites in order to be authenticated as having been revealed by God, and therefore recited in prayer as the Qur’an: 1) Must be in correct Arabic; 2) Agrees with the *rasm* of the five UCs as well as the Master Medinan Archetype (the “Imam” Manuscript belonging to Uthman himself), the former of which were sent to the *Amsar* (major metropolitan areas); 3) The *isnad* must be *tawatur* (attested by multiple-attestation).⁹⁷⁰ If a particular reading has only a few transmitters and does not reach *tawatur* (تواتر), the reading may actually be the Qur’an, but it is considered *mashhur* (مشهور) or *ahad* (أحد) and *not* recited, and usually maintained as having the strength of a *hadith*. If the *isnad* is unsound, it is *shath* (شاذ), meaning isolated or anomalous, and can never be considered to be the Qur’an, but may have the strength of a *hadith*. If the *recitation* (قراءة) of a particular text contains a grammatical error, then it is *mawdu’* (fabricated), while its *rasm*

⁹⁶⁷ *ibid*, 114-117.

⁹⁶⁸ *Hadith* in al-Bukhari.

⁹⁶⁹ Usmani, trans. by Siddiqui, *An Approach to the Quranic Sciences*, 115-117.

⁹⁷⁰ See: Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman al-Suyuti, trans. by Hamid Algar, Michael Schub, and Ayman Abdel Haleem, *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'an vol 1, Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Reading: Garnet, 2011), 181-185.

is correct and *isnad* is sound (although there are no examples of the latter). Finally, if a text contains an “addition to gloss the text as a hermeneutical strategy,”⁹⁷¹ then it is called *mudraj* (interpolated), a textual aberration. Dirks’ lack of awareness of such things is made apparent by his quick and over-simplistic comment regarding the final recension of the UC: “(it) consisted primarily of standardizing minor differences in dialect among the various Arab-speaking Muslims of the time.”⁹⁷² And that’s it; *nothing* at all about the Seven Letters and their significance. Dirks then accuses the New Testament of being the victim of “cut-and-paste compiling... editorial rewrites or redactionist revisions,”⁹⁷³ exactly the types of things Toby Lester once said about the Yemeni palimpsest with its *scriptio inferior* and *superior*.⁹⁷⁴ Interestingly, Al-Azami also fails to mention the two layers of the manuscript’s text and simply dismisses the differences as strictly orthographical, boldly claiming, “This deflates the entire controversy.”⁹⁷⁵

Al-Suyuti points out that there are several examples of *mudraj* (مدرج) readings, that is, textual aberrations that disagree with the *rasm* and have unsound *isnads*, found in the books of *hadith* and mentioned in the books of ‘*ulum al-Qur’an*. Many of these readings are attributed to Companions of the Prophet, yet al-Suyuti is adamant that the Sahaba may have inserted these interpolations into the text with the assumption that the *qira’ah* was already well-established.⁹⁷⁶ Unfortunately, later reciters conflated them with the Qur’an. Ibn Ka’b’s *mushaf*, for example, contains Q 33:6.1, but with a slight addition.

⁹⁷¹ *ibid*, 186-187.

⁹⁷² Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 45. On page 47, Dirks uses the phrase: “merely standardized dialectic differences.”

⁹⁷³ *ibid*, 46.

⁹⁷⁴ Toby Lester, “What is the Qur’an?” in *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1999).

⁹⁷⁵ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 112.

⁹⁷⁶ al-Suyuti, trans. by Algar, Schub, and Haleem, *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur’an vol 1, Al-Itqan fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an*, 186-187.

The UC reads: “The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are (like) their mothers.” Ibn Ka’b, however, reads: “The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, *he is (like) a father to them* (هو أب لهم), and his wives are (like) their mothers.” This gloss seems to be Ibn Kab’s addition to the text for his own purposes. According to the *tafsir* of al-Tabari, however, Imam Hasan said that this verse initially included this phrase, but it was abrogated by the Prophet during his “Final Recension” (المعارضة الاخيرة) with the guidance of Gabriel. Thus Ibn Ka’b preserved the initial reading. Nonetheless, many ‘ulema consider the reading to be anomalous (شاذ) due to a weak *isnad*. However, if Ka’b added the gloss for interpretive purposes or otherwise, then it is surely a *mudraj* reading. For Ernst and other Islamicists, the idea of invoking abrogation (نسخ) in the face of variant readings seems like a convenient cover-up, and they question whether such readings actually originated with the Prophet, or even whether the Companions believed that the Qur’an was the literal *ipsissima verba Dei*. The point is: *the reading exists* contra Dirks who declares, “No variant version of the Qur’an exists.”⁹⁷⁷ It appears in the pre-Uthmanic codex of Ubay b. Ka’b, but unlike the case of the *pericope adulterae* in John, Kab’s *shath* reading was not heavily reproduced, but similar to the case of the *pericope adulterae*, it is not (no longer) considered an authentic part of the Qur’an. Neither the case of the *pericope adulterae* nor the *shath* phrase of Q 33:6.1 constitutes *tahrif* of their respective Scriptures; the truth regarding these passages manifested itself through the ‘ulema being guided by Providence.

⁹⁷⁷ Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 47.

“Pre-John Tradition,” the Search for an Archetype, and an Appraisal of SMB M.M. al-Azami

With respect to “post-John” alternations to the Gospel of John, SMB al-Azami paraphrases Ehrman (*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*) and writes: “... with every new variant created (by rival groups) they hurled the original further and further into obscurity.”⁹⁷⁸ However with the identification and expungement of these aberrant variants from the Gospel of John (like the “*υιος*” reading of John 1:18 and the *pericope adulterae*), coupled with the discovery of the ancient MSS P66, P75, *κ*, and B whose Alexandrian text-type is congenially described by al-Azami (citing Comfort) as “fairly accurate in meaning”⁹⁷⁹ (بالمعنى), and characterized (P66 and P75) by Metzger as “going back to an archetype,”⁹⁸⁰ will SMBs finally accept the text of John as being the very *Injil* of the Qur’an? Not likely. Even if they were to concede that the UBS’s 4th critical ed. represents the best possible text of John, it still cannot be the very *Injil*; it is in the wrong “style,” the wrong language, and it contradicts the Qur’an. With respect to “pre-John” times, SMBs claim that Jesus Christ received God’s Revelation from about 30-33 CE, which was written down, then expanded upon/corrupted by Christians in writing and oral tradition (*kerygma*), then deficiently rehashed by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John a few decades later, who according to al-Azami (citing Mack), “willfully twisted the text (each in his own way) to achieve their desired aims,”⁹⁸¹ then it was lost altogether. Thus for the SMBs, *tahrif* was a reality in the “pre-John” period.

⁹⁷⁸ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 289.

⁹⁷⁹ *ibid*, 283.

⁹⁸⁰ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 5.

⁹⁸¹ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 280.

The textually-critical approach to the New Testament is exemplified by M.M. al-Azami in his book *The History of the Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* as well as by Jerald Dirks (former ordained minister and M.Div. from Harvard Divinity School) in his book *The Cross and the Crescent*.⁹⁸² Thus a critical appraisal of their research becomes necessary for the present work. Al-Azami repeats the popular claim of the SMBs that the actual *Injil*, the Archetype, was Q, also known as the Sayings Gospel, something similar to the style of the Gospel of Thomas, and the common source of Matthew and Luke probably written between the 30s and 50s CE thus making it antecedent and concurrent with Paul's writings. Harris says: "Q was apparently a Gospel in its own right, providing the first written witness to Jesus' primary teachings,"⁹⁸³ and that it was probably written "by a community of itinerant preachers living in Galilee or western Syria who regarded Jesus as both prophet and wisdom teacher."⁹⁸⁴ The theory of Q, also called the Two-Source theory, assumes "Markan Priority," and was formulated around 1900 by Streeter and developed by Robinson, Koester, and Mack. The Two-Source Theory remains the most widely-accepted solution to the so-called "synoptic problem," although there are some who continue to endorse the rival Farmer-Griesbach "Two-Gospel" theory that the order of the Synoptics is Matt - Lk - Mk or even St. Augustine's hypothesis (Matt - Mk - Lk). With respect to Q, Al-Azami says: "This work is now designated as *the Gospel of Jesus*"⁹⁸⁵ (emphasis mine). However, in the very next sentence, al-Azami mentions that Q

⁹⁸² Dirks is also the author of the more polemical *What You Weren't Taught in Sunday School* (Beltsville: Amana, 2011).

⁹⁸³ Harris, *The New Testament, A Student's Introduction* (Mountain View: Mayfield, 1999), 89.

⁹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁸⁵ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 279.

“was not a stable text,”⁹⁸⁶ and subsequently endorses Mack’s theory that Q had three layers (as does Dirks):⁹⁸⁷ Layer One (Q1): Contained the simple teachings of Christ written by “the earliest followers;”⁹⁸⁸ Layer Two (Q2): Appended to Q by later Christians in which Jesus promises the destruction of those who disbelieve in his message; Layer Three (Q3): Appended to Q by even later Christians during the Jewish War (66-70 CE) which depicts Jesus as the Son of God.⁹⁸⁹ Thus according to al-Azami, and other SMBs, Q1 is the *Injil* of Jesus while the language, style, and content of the NT Gospels preclude them from being accepted by Muslims as the *Injil*.

33 CE	50s CE	66-70 CE	70 CE	80 CE	85-90 CE
Q1 (<i>Injil</i>)	Q2	Q3, <i>M?</i>, <i>L?</i>		Matthew	Luke
Early Markan Oral Traditions about Jesus			Mark		

- Forty Years of Oral Tradition (loose pericopes and stories put into a narrative format) = MARK
- **Q1 + Q2 + Q3 + Mark (Redacted) + Special Matthean Material (*M*) = MATTHEW**
- **Q1 + Q2 + Q3 + Mark (Redacted) + Special Lukan Material (*L*) = LUKE**

Q1 as the Injil Archetype: Language

Also, while most SMBs claim that the *Injil* was revealed in Syriac, Al-Azami does not mention this explicitly, but rather references Schweitzer in order to demonstrate “Christian ignorance of Jesus’ most fundamental attributes.”⁹⁹⁰ According to Schweitzer,

⁹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁸⁷ Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 61-62.

⁹⁸⁸ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 279. Cf. Burton Mack, *A Myth of Christian Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) and *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993).

⁹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 280.

⁹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 268.

Jesus spoke: Galilean dialect of Chaldaic (Scaliger); Syriac (Saumaise); the dialect of Onkelos and Jonathan (Walton); Greek (Vossius); Hebrew (Delitzch and Resch); Aramaic (Meyer); Latin (Inchofer).⁹⁹¹ However, given Jesus' eclectic context and multilingual milieu, it is not impossible that he spoke multiple languages; he may have taught in Syriac, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. This might explain why Pilate wrote the *titlos* above the cross in "Hebrew/Syriac, Roman (Latin), and Greek" (Ἑβραϊστί Ῥωμαϊστί Ἑλληνιστί [John 19:20.9]). When Pilate was interrogating Jesus in John 18, what language were they speaking? Syriac or Greek, perhaps Latin? All of these are easily conceivable. Schiffman says that working-class Galilean tradesmen, like Jesus and his Disciples, were probably fluent in several languages due to their contacts with different cultural elements.⁹⁹² And as I mentioned earlier, the Qur'an itself gives us the biggest clue as to what language the *Injil* was initially recorded: *Greek!* - the very word "*Injil*" being an Arabicized form of the Greek εὐαγγέλιον (evangel). Thus I disagree with Ibn Taymiyyah's assessment of the Greek language being "unable to express detailed meanings and to distinguish between the subtle ones and main ones by special terms that enunciate the truth," and that "in perfection, it [Arabic] is followed by the Hebrew language."⁹⁹³ The subtleties, complexities, and exactness of Greek, in my view, far outshine the impoverished language of the Israelites. Another problem for the SMB who maintains that Q1 is the Archetype is the fact the vast majority of NT scholars believe that Q1 was written in Greek, not Syriac. This would explain why Matthew and Luke

⁹⁹¹ *ibid.* Al-Azami cites: Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Collier Books, 1968, p. 13.

⁹⁹² See: Lawrence H. Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple & Rabbinic Judaism* (Ktav Pub. Inc, 1991).

⁹⁹³ Quoted from Yahya Michot, "Revelation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 188, citing Yahya Michot, "A Mamluk theologian's commentary on Avicenna's *Risala Adhawiyya*: being a translation of a part of the *Dar'al-Ta'arud* of Ibn Taymiyyah, with introduction, annotation, and appendices," Part II, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14/3 (2003), p. 344.

very often have identical or near identical wordings from Q source material. If both were independently translating from a Syriac document, then (ironically) only something similar to divine inspiration could account for these identifications and resemblances!

Q1 as the Injil Archetype: Content

A greater problem facing the SMB is that according to their theory, Q1, the “true *Injil*,” was actually corrupted beyond repair (by Q2 and Q3) while the Qur’an says: “There can be no changer of His words” (Q 6:115.5). Subsequently, it was lost, thus deeming the SMB argument to be *argumentum ex silentio*. The Qur’an also contends that if the Christians would just follow the “*Injil*” correctly, that is to say, interpret it correctly, then they would come to recognize Jesus as only human and Muhammad as a Prophet. This argument becomes utterly ridiculous if we suppose that Q1 *alone* is the *Injil* being referenced, a document that has *zero* available MSS! Is the Qur’an exhorting the Christians to simply cherry-pick from the New Testament whatever their limited understandings deem to be in agreement with the Qur’an, and expect them to know exactly what Q1 consists of? - Yet condemn those who “believe in part of the Bible and reject other parts” (Q 2:85.5)? Furthermore, when we actually isolate the contents of Q (1,2, and 3) we don’t get a crucifixion, as al-Azami correctly (and happily) mentions,⁹⁹⁴ but we also do not get an annunciation or virgin birth narrative of Jesus (!) which is mentioned in detail twice in the Qur’an. Q material can be more easily isolated if one has

⁹⁹⁴ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 280.

a synopsis of the NT Gospels, such as Aland's *Synopsis of Four Gospels*. According to Harris, Q consists of about 250 verses which include:⁹⁹⁵

<u>Q Material</u> ⁹⁹⁶	<u>Luke</u>	<u>Matthew</u>
The ministry of John the Baptist	3:7-9, 16-17	3:7-12
The testing of Jesus by Satan	4:1-4, 9-12, 5-8, 13	4:1-11
The Beatitudes	6:20-26	5:3, 4, 6, 11-12
Love enemies/golden rule	6:27-36	5:44, 39-42; 7:12
Construction on sand/rock	6:46-49	7:21, 24-27
Healing of Roman officer's slave	7:1-10	7:28; 8:5-10, 13
Praise by Jesus for John the Baptist	7:24-28	11:7-11
The differences between Jesus and John	7:31-35	11:16-19
The commissioning of the disciples	10:2-12	9:37-38; 10:7-16
The Lord's Prayer	11:2-4	6:9-13
The Sign of Jonah	11:16, 29-32	12:38-42
The rejection of God's wisdom	11:49-51	23:34-36
Avoidance of anxieties and reliance on God	12:22-31	6:25-33
The great feast	14:16-24	22:1-10
The rejection of family ties	14:26-27	10:37-39
The parable of invested money	19:12-26	25:14-30

According to the theory above, Christians would have to reject the two annunciation and birth narratives of Jesus Christ contained in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-35; 2:7-21 because these texts come from the evangelists' special material called *M* and *L* respectively by NT textual critics, and not from Q1, nor even from Q2 or Q3. Thus according to al-Azami these texts are severely corrupted especially since one of them contains a reference to Jesus as the "Son of God" (Luke 1:35). However, the Qur'an clearly engages with these texts and even explicitly confirms, by way of paraphrase, specific biblical verses. For example, in Luke 1:28 the angel says to Mary (according to MSS: A, C, D, Θ):⁹⁹⁷ "Be of *good cheer!*... Blessed are you *among all women!*" while in

⁹⁹⁵ Harris, *The New Testament, A Student's Introduction*, 90. Harris recommends Miller for a more complete reconstruction of Q's probable contents. See: Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Complete Gospels*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 249-300. Also see: Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1982) 341-355.

⁹⁹⁶ Harris, *The New Testament, A Student's Introduction*, 90.

⁹⁹⁷ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd edition, 108. He says: "Although many witnesses (including A C D), and most minuscules, followed by the Textus Receptus) read after σοῦ the

the Qur'an we find the angel(s) say: "(God) has chosen you *among all women*... God gives you *glad tidings*... (Q 3:42.5, 45.5).⁹⁹⁸ Thus SMBs encounter the same difficulty here that we explained earlier with respect to the Prologue: Why would God confirm a "corrupted" biblical narrative that additionally contains a "blasphemous" title for Jesus? Perhaps there is a variant reading of Luke 1:35 that does not contain the phrase "Son of God?" The answer is no. Even if modern archeologists should come upon a manuscript of Luke 1:35 that reads "Son of Mary," SMBs operating under the premise that only Q1 is the *Injil*, would have to reject the narrative because these texts (including Matthew's) come from their special material according to the Two-Source Theory - material referred to by al-Azami as "twisted" and "mythology."⁹⁹⁹ I contend, however, that these biblical birth narratives are very much part and parcel of the *Injil*, just as they are with respect to the Qur'an, but we need to understand phrases such as "Son of God" or "Son of the Highest" (υἱὸς ὑψίστου [Luke 1:32.5]) as Hebraisms denoting the Messiah, not the second person of a triune godhead. When it comes to the Gospel of John, SMBs run into another problem: The Qur'an is replete with allusions and intertextual references to the Gospel of John such as Jesus as the Word, the man *born* blind, John the Baptist/Disciples

words εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναιξίν, it is probable that copyists inserted them here from ver. 42, where they are firmly attested. If the clause had been original in the present verse, there is no adequate reason why it should have been omitted from a wide diversity of early witnesses (including □ B L W 3 f1 565 700 1241 syrpal copsa, bo arm geo al)." The phrase εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναιξίν, however, is also mentioned in Luke 1:42.5 and considered authentic by the UBS.

⁹⁹⁸ Rumi says: "Once while she was pregnant, the mother of John found Mary, also with child, sitting before her. She told Mary that she perceived within Mary's womb, 'a king,' who was to be a prophet of the first rank, and that she felt the child within her own womb bowing and prostrating himself in deference to the child in Mary's, and that all this was causing her terrible trial and pain. Jesus, Mary replied, was doing the same prostrations in her womb." Javad Nurbakhsh, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, 28-29. Rumi is retelling the Lukan version of the story, e.g., "And it happened that when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leapt in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit" (καὶ ἐγένετο ὥς ἤκουσεν τὸν ἀσπασμὸν τῆς Μαρίας ἡ Ἐλισάβετ ἐσκίρτησεν τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου ἡ Ἐλισάβετ [Luke 1:41]).

⁹⁹⁹ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 280.

as “witnesses,” the “language of Sent,” the Paraclete, Christic “Signs,” Christic “I am statements,” Christ as a “Nazarene,” Jesus raising the dead “by God’s leave,” Jewish slander of Jesus’ legitimacy, etc., all of which I will explicate upon in the next chapter *Deo Volente*, yet *none* of these things are in Q1. Also the fact that the Qur’an mentions that Jesus raised the dead (موتى), in the *plural*, means that the Gospel extends beyond John and includes the Synoptics as well, since Jesus *only* raises Lazarus in John.¹⁰⁰⁰

The Fourfold Injil

The true Gospel of Jesus is referred to *among Christians* as “Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John;” in the Qur’an it is called the *Injil*, as these books contain the three degrees of Revelation (وحي): *tanzil* (وحي من الله) (*ipsissima verba Dei*); *nabuwwa* (وحي من) (*ipsissima vox Dei per prophetam*); and *ilham* or *iha’a*¹⁰⁰¹ (إلهام) (*ipsissima vox Dei per sanctum virum*). These books accurately convey the essence of the message (رسالة) of Jesus Christ despite attempts to corrupt the text by

¹⁰⁰⁰ SMBs may object here and point out that the Qur’an also confirms a miracle recorded in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, a document that presents Jesus as a murderous youth. Thus the Qur’an is in fact confirming an aspect of a corrupted narrative about Jesus, but accepting this description of Jesus’ *ethos* is impossible. My response is twofold: Firstly, I agree, the description of Jesus as homicidal is not compatible with the agreed-upon *ethos*, or “well established precedent” (Cf. J. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, 287) of any prophet, let alone Jesus, thus it must be rejected, on the grounds of what J. Brown said: “[Scriptural] interpretations were valid as long as they accorded with the overall message of God and His Prophet as understood by the ulama” (J. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, 84). Thus we may depart from the “Rule of Interpretation” (*Qanun al-Ta’wil*) here and adopt a figurative meaning to understand Jesus’ alleged actions. Secondly, a *total* rejection of the account of Jesus murdering people as a youth in Thomas is also possible because the Infancy Gospel of Thomas does not constitute what the Christians universally recognize as the *Injil* at the time of Muhammad. The author of this document was not inspired by God, but happened to record a true tradition about Jesus. In situations like this, where the Qur’an or *hadith* confirm a story or event in an apocryphal Gospel, the “wheat must be separated from the chaff.” Thus Christians do not have to accept the authenticity of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, but must accept a story of Jesus mentioned in the Qur’an that the author of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas happened to mention.

¹⁰⁰¹ As stated earlier, although the Qur’an contains references to non-Prophets who received Revelation from God which use the verb *awha* (أوحى), Usmani prefers to refer to this type of Level III Revelation as *iha’a* (إحاء) rather than *wahy* (وحي) in order to distinguish Revelation given to Prophets and Revelation given to *prophetic* individuals. Usmani, trans. by Siddiqui, *An Approach to the Quranic Sciences*, 115-117.

scribes with various theo-Christological leanings. However, al-Azami raises a good point. He repeats the oft-repeated question asked by higher biblical critics such as Koester that if Matthew and Luke truly believed that Mark was inspired by God, would they have “altered, omitted, and abbreviated many of Mark’s stories?”¹⁰⁰² This is of course if we assume Markan priority, which I do. My answer involves an appeal to how Revelation works as a providentially guided process. Certainly in the Qur’an and Torah we read the same stories retold with slight variations. Wellhausen (d. 1918) proposed his Documentary Hypothesis (DH) to explain this phenomenon in the latter text which theorizes that the Pentateuch is a composite work of four textual traditions (J, E, D, and P) woven together by a “redactor” (R; probably Ezra) sometime during the post-exilic period. Although the Orthodox generally reject the DH, and for some good reasons, Conservative Jews (*Masorti*) do not have major issues with it, but insist that the entire process was done “by God’s hand,” and that R is in reality *Rabbenu*, “Our Teacher.”¹⁰⁰³ It is interesting to encounter Muslims, such as Dirks,¹⁰⁰⁴ who believe that the Qur’an is a Revelation of God, utilizing the likes of Troeltschians such as Koester or Wellhausen in their appraisals of the Old and New Testaments, perhaps not realizing that Wellhausen also maintained that the Qur’an represents a book composed of various Christologies assimilated by its author, Muhammad, who essentially foisted it upon humanity as a “Revelation” from God.¹⁰⁰⁵ However, Wellhausen may still be correct about the formation of the Pentateuch, and given his academic credentials, Muslim confessionals

¹⁰⁰² Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 280.

¹⁰⁰³ See: Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 209; Franz Rosenzweig, *Franz Rosenzweig His Life and Thought* presented by Nahum N. Glatzer (New York, 1953), 158.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 48-53.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Julius Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin: 1887), 204-212.

who espouse his positions on the Torah must be equally willing to analyze his positions regarding the Qur'an. With this said, and given the fact that the Qur'an often retells the same stories at different times, in order to stress aspects of the narrative that are significant for its *initial* audience - for instance the Meccan and Medinan nativity narratives of Jesus in *Surahs* 3 and 19 - the fact that the autograph authors of Matthew and Luke reworked Markan pericopes to appeal to a particular Christian audience does not preclude that these texts are inspired or guided "by God's hand." Al-Azami says, partially quoting Comfort: "The early Christians did not necessarily treat the NT text as a 'sacred' text, one whose every letter was fixed and holy."¹⁰⁰⁶ If it is al-Azami's belief that only a text whose *every letter* is fixed is *holy*, then are the *ahadith* and Qur'an holy?

I find it incredibly ironic, and indeed providential, that the oldest MSS of the Gospel of John (P52) and the Qur'an (the Birmingham MS; dated no later than 645 CE/24 h.)¹⁰⁰⁷ ever discovered contain a reference to the death of Jesus (John 18:32) and a portion of a *surah* (Q Surah 19)¹⁰⁰⁸ which alludes to Jesus as 'food from above' and 'cleansing and nourishing waters from below' (Q 19:24-25) as well as a Qur'anic Johannine-style Christic "I am statement" (Q 19:30)! While Q1 has zero manuscript evidence and would not have contained a passion prediction according to SMBs, the absolute oldest surviving witnesses to the Gospel contains this element. Thus the Gospel extends far beyond simply Q1. In fact, the final verse of the Gospel of John (21:25) states

¹⁰⁰⁶ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 283.

¹⁰⁰⁷ The Birmingham manuscript is kept in the Mingana Collection of Middle-Eastern Manuscripts and was originally cataloged as Mingana 1572a and misdated before it was accurately identified by Hungarian scholar Alba Fedeli in 2015. The entire manuscript may be viewed at the Cadbury Research Library Virtual Manuscript Room: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/cadbury/quran-manuscript/index.aspx>

¹⁰⁰⁸ The manuscript contains: Folio 1 *recto*: Q 18:17-23, *verso*: Q 18:23.5-31.5; Folio 2 *recto*: Q 19:91-98, 20:1-13.1, *verso*: Q 20:13.5-40.1.

that the “whole Jesus” cannot be captured in a single document, not even John. The real Jesus is *expansive* (موسوع). To use Ghazali’s analogy with the Qur’an in his *Jewels*, Jesus is like an ocean whose most precious stones lie in the great deep. Interestingly, the equivalent root letters of his name “Yeshua” (יֵשׁוּעַ) in Arabic are *wa-sa-’a* (وسع), according to the BDB.¹⁰⁰⁹ Thus the very literal etymological cognate of Yeshua would be the passive participle *mawsu’* (موسوع), meaning “extended, wide, vast.” And just as some *ayat* of the Qur’an are more “precious” than others, according to Ghazali’s understanding, the Gospel is no different. Brown says: “It is almost as if the (Johannine) evangelist wants to portray as elementary the christological tradition known to the other Gospels and to begin his Gospel at a stage where the others end.”¹⁰¹⁰ I agree. The “Fourth Gospel” is for the spiritually advanced. I believe that this is the very position of the Qur’an; it refers to the Revelation of Jesus as “Gospel” in the singular, not to repudiate the four canonical gospels, but rather to suggest that it is a “fourfold canonical *Gospel*” to use Watson’s phrase,¹⁰¹¹ and even mentions events which have been labeled as “apocryphal” by Christian scholarship. Watson says: “In its fourfold form, the canonical gospel actually *prescribes* difference. It represents the recognition that no single telling of Jesus’ story can be final and definitive, and that the same story must be told and retold in variant forms.”¹⁰¹² SMBs who insist that Q1 is “the Gospel” or that Matthew is “more correct” than John have failed to grasp the Qur’an’s unique assimilation and confirmation of the fourfold canonical Gospel, its unique “retelling,” and therefore miss vital

¹⁰⁰⁹ BDB, 446.

¹⁰¹⁰ Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 339.

¹⁰¹¹ Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 8.

¹⁰¹² *ibid*, 13.

opportunities to understand the nuances of the Qur'an's intertextual engagement with, let's say, the Gospel of John. Irenaeus rightfully condemned Christian elements who championed one Gospel and rejected the others, as this leads to an incomplete and often erroneous apprehension of the Gospel of Jesus and is as bad as falsifying texts according to the Bishop of Lyons; the Ebionites used only Matthew, the Gnostics only Mark, the Marcionites only Luke, and the Valentinian Gnostics only John.¹⁰¹³ As problematic as many of the early fathers' commentaries are for Muslim readers today, in light of *'ilm al-hadith* principles in which the *isnad* takes center-stage, the early proto-orthodox also recognized the crucial importance of establishing "apostolic succession" for the writings they revered. Tertullian claimed that "the churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God,"¹⁰¹⁴ and even provides an *isnad* for the church at Smyrna: God → Jesus → John → Polycarp, the Bishop.¹⁰¹⁵ Although as Ehrman adds, other groups also claimed apostolic succession for their views,¹⁰¹⁶ the Qur'an's confirmation of the fourfold Gospel suggests that early fathers such as Irenaeus got the books right, with an understanding that there is also "Gospel truth" in other books, although from a Christian perspective, these truths were contained in books with dubious origins. Concerning *this* topic, it seems as if Dirks should have known better, yet claims, "the early Christian tradition totally failed to record any *Isnad*."¹⁰¹⁷

The "Jewels of the Gospel" According to Ghazalian Nomenclature

Mark: For the Beginner (مبتدأ): shells on the shore

Matthew: For the Legalist (فقيه): musk on the islands

Luke: For the Philosopher (فيلسوف): pearls

John: For the Mystic (صوفي): rubies

¹⁰¹³ *Adv. haer.* 3.11.7-8.

¹⁰¹⁴ *Prescription*, 21.

¹⁰¹⁵ *Prescription*, 32.

¹⁰¹⁶ *ibid*, 193.

¹⁰¹⁷ Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 60.

The Inspired Style of John

SMBs like al-Azami claim that “the NT never claims itself to be the work of inspiration.”¹⁰¹⁸ This premise explains for them why the NT Gospels, such as John, appear to be in a very “uninspired” style - a style that resembles *Sirah* literature and not Revelation, like the Qur’an. The Qur’an is rhythmic, semipoetic (but not strictly poetry), repetitive, multifaceted in its meanings, contains stories that have transcendental significance and relevance for all listeners, and according to modern research on the Qur’an conducted by Islamicists such as Ernst,¹⁰¹⁹ Farrin,¹⁰²⁰ and Cuypers,¹⁰²¹ and ‘ulema such as al-Farahi (d. 1349/1930)¹⁰²² and Islahi (d. 1418/1997),¹⁰²³ it exhibits a symmetrical structure that both demonstrates its narrative unity and emphasizes certain foci (Ar. ‘*umud* [عمود]).

First of all, it can be convincingly argued that the Paraclete, “the Holy Spirit,” of Jesus’ Final Discourse (cc. 14-17), is the actual source of John’s writing, *according to John* - a Spirit that enables the Johannine community in the first instance, and then the remainder of the believing community by extension, to experience Jesus’ life and teachings in their full(er) theo-Christological significances.¹⁰²⁴ In other words, the autograph author is in fact implying divine inspiration for his Gospel; he is revealing

¹⁰¹⁸ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 281.

¹⁰¹⁹ See: Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an*, 2013.

¹⁰²⁰ See: Raymond Farrin, *Structure and Qur’anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam’s Holy Text* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2014).

¹⁰²¹ See: Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur’an* (Miami: Convivium Press, 2009) and Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur’an: Rhetorical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁰²² See: Hamid al-Din al-Farahi, trans. by Tariq Mahmood Hashimi, *Exordium to Coherence in the Qur’an: Muqaddamah Nizam al-Qur’an* (Lahore: al-Mawrid, 2013).

¹⁰²³ See: Amin Ahsan al-Islahi, *Tadabbur-i-Qur’an* (Urdu *tafsir*).

¹⁰²⁴ C. Stephen Evans, “The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 102.

Christ by allowing the Paraclete to inspire him. Thus the long metaphysical/philosophical discourses in the form of monologues and dialogues about Jesus' exalted status and relational unity with the Father exist in the Johannine text because the Paraclete is telling the *Mulham* evangelist the narrative. Additionally, the fact that the Qur'an frequently alludes to the Gospel of John renders the latter *ipso facto* a revealed text. As far as stylistic features are concerned, I demonstrated earlier that many sections of the Gospel of John do display symmetrical structures, and that Moloney often refers to this technique as Johannine "framing."¹⁰²⁵ Brown also mentions that the Prologue, the High Priestly Prayer (John 17), as well as the dialogues (with Nicodemus [John 3] and the Samaritan woman [John 4], for example) display "a uniquely solemn pattern... that some would call semipoetic.." not of "rhyme, but *rhythm*, i.e., lines of approximately the same length, each constituting a clause."¹⁰²⁶ Brown also mentions the Gospel's "twofold meanings" as being an example of "the multifaceted aspect of revelation,"¹⁰²⁷ and that the evangelist "frequently intends the reader to see *several layers of meaning* in the same narrative or in the same metaphor"¹⁰²⁸ (emphasis mine). Often times, listeners of Jesus will misunderstand a metaphor and take only the "material meaning,"¹⁰²⁹ prompting Christ to explain himself further. The lessons of "misunderstanding" Christ and the substance of his clarifications, such as his "five arguments" (John 5:31-47), have immense transcendental significance for believers in God today. At a personal level, one must also identify Johannine archetypes in the text and determine how they relate to our present

¹⁰²⁵ See: Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *Sacra Pagina, The Gospel of John* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 23-24.

¹⁰²⁶ Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 333.

¹⁰²⁷ *ibid*, 335.

¹⁰²⁸ *ibid*, 335-336.

¹⁰²⁹ *ibid*.

human condition. Just as one is encouraged to envision oneself as ‘Abdullah b. Maktum, the blind man who despite his disabilities and inadequacies sought out Muhammad (Q 80:1-9), the man born blind of John 9 “stands for the human race.”¹⁰³⁰ Bauckham further says: “The Epilogue balances the Prologue at the beginning of the Gospel, with the Prologue sketching the prehistory to the Gospel’s story, while the Epilogue foresees its history.”¹⁰³¹ And while many traditional Muslim ‘*ulema* mention numerical compositions as being a facet of the Qur’an’s ‘*ijaz*, there are “many” of these in John as well.¹⁰³² For example: “The Prologue has 496 syllables, while the Epilogue, correspondingly, has 496 words.”¹⁰³³ 496 also happens to be the numerical value of μονογενής¹⁰³⁴ (used in John 1:14, 18.). The Prologue also exhibits a clear chiastic structure with a *Leitmotif*.¹⁰³⁵ Thus we can say that contra SMBs, the style of the Gospel of John appears to be much more revelatory - much more ‘Qur’anic’ - than say Q1 or Thomas with all of their seemingly disparate sayings. With respect to Johannine repetition, the HCM explains this by seeing John 16:4-33 as an expanded version of 14:1-31; it surmises John 14 to be an earlier discourse. However, Moloney sees in John 13 and the Farewell Discourse, and I agree with him, a beautiful chiastic structure and demands its readers to hone in on a specific focus (عماد) nestled right in the midst of the two “departure discourses.” The presence of such a chiasm suggests that the text is not nearly as haphazard as historical critics make it

¹⁰³⁰ *ibid*, 348. This is Augustine (*In Johannem* 44.1; CC 36.381).

¹⁰³¹ Richard Bauckham, “The Fourth Gospel as the Testimony of the Beloved Disciple” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 127.

¹⁰³² *ibid*.

¹⁰³³ *ibid*.

¹⁰³⁴ Bauckham cites: M. J.J. Menken, *Numerical Literacy Techniques in John: The Fourth Evangelist’s Use of Numbers of Words and Syllables* (NovTSup 55; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 21.

¹⁰³⁵ Paul N. Anderson, “On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John’s Christological Tensions,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 341-342.

out to be; the text is unified, cohesive, creative, and according to some, displays the very “fingerprint” of God. The specific structure of the passage is referred to by Ernst as “concentric construction”¹⁰³⁶ (A/B//C//B/A), where mirroring textual units surround a focus that has universal significance.

A) John 13:1-38

His time has come (ἦλθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα),

Love to the utmost extreme (τέλος)

Major themes: GLORY & LOVE

B) John 14: D E P A R T U R E (Follow the commandments of Jesus; Paraclete is coming)

C) FOCUS (John 15, especially 4-10 [see below]):** Union (جمع) with Christ: “Remaining” (بقاء) in Jesus - *Be Christic, be lordly* ([Q 3:79.5] كنوا ربانيين)

B) John 16: D E P A R T U R E (Follow the commandments of Jesus; Paraclete is coming)

A) John 17:1-26

The time has come (ἐλήλυθεν ἡ ὥρα),

Finish (τελειόω) the work

Major themes: GLORY & LOVE

(John 15:4) Remain in me, and I (will **remain**) in you.¹⁰³⁷ Just as the branch is not able to bear fruit by itself unless it **remains** on the vine, neither will you, unless you **remain** in me. **(5)** I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who **remains** in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit, because apart from me, you are not able to do anything. **(6)** If someone does not **remain** in me, he will be cast out like the branch withers, and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned up. **(7)** If you **remain** in me and my words **remain** in you, ask for whatever you want, and it will happen for you!¹⁰³⁸ **(8)** In this is my Father glorified: That you bear much fruit and become my disciples. **(9)** Just as

¹⁰³⁶ Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, 161.

¹⁰³⁷ This statement is strikingly similar to the Qur'anic (2:152.1): “Remember me and I will remember you” (فأذكروني إذكركم), which is a part of the central pivot or focus of *Surah al-Baqarah* according to Farrin! See: Raymond Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*.

¹⁰³⁸ This is similar to the famous the *hadith qudsi* (mentioned earlier) about which Junayd says intimates *istighraq* (objective *tawhid* or immersion) in God... "if he (my servant) were to ask anything from Me, I shall surely give it to him" (Bukhari).

the Father loved me, I loved you (*agapistically*);¹⁰³⁹ **remain** in my love (*agape*). (10) If you keep my precepts, you will **remain** in my love,¹⁰⁴⁰ just as I have kept the precepts of my Father so I **remain** in His love.

Rae also mentions that Girard and Marsh, although the latter two take the crucifixion and resurrection as “the seventh sign” rather than Jesus walking on the sea, regard the seven signs as constituting a chiastic arrangement with the focus on the “multiplication of loaves and fish in chapter 6.”¹⁰⁴¹

- 1) The wedding feast in Cana (2:1-12)
- 2) The restoration of the dying son (4:46-54)
- 3) The Sabbath healing at Bethesda (5:1-16)
- 4) The multiplication of loaves and fishes (6:1-71)**
- 5) The Sabbath healing of the blind man (9:1-41)
- 6) The restoration of Lazarus to life (11:1-44)
- 7) The great hour of Jesus: his mother, the cross, and the issue of blood and water from Jesus’ side (19:25-37)¹⁰⁴²

The Origins of John

The question of whether John was written independently of the Synoptics has challenged NT scholars for decades. Neirynck, being in the minority, believed John was heavily dependent on the Synoptics,¹⁰⁴³ while Bultmann believed it partially was, and according to his famous theory, John is derived from three independent sources: 1) A document of *Semeia* (Signs); 2) A Revelatory Discourse Source, originally written in Aramaic which was translated into Greek and assimilated by the evangelist; 3)

¹⁰³⁹ This verse intimates the Johannine *leitmotif* of adoption into the *familia dei*; just as God loved Jesus as His Son, Jesus loved the Disciples as his children.

¹⁰⁴⁰ John 15:10 parallels the iconic Q 3:31 (the verse of examination): "Say: If you love God, then follow me. Then will God love you and forgive for you your sins. God is Forgiving, Intimately Loving."

¹⁰⁴¹ Murray Rae, "The Testimony of Works in the Christology of John's Gospel," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 303. Cf. M. Girard, "La composition structurelle des sept signes dans le quatrieme evangile," *SR* 9 (1980): 315-24; John Marsh, *Saint John* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 65-66.

¹⁰⁴² Murray Rae, "The Testimony of Works in the Christology of John's Gospel," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 304.

¹⁰⁴³ Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 364 who cites who cites EJ 73-106; and in *John and the Synoptics*, ed. A Denaux (BETL 101; Leuven Univ., 1992), 1-62.

Passion/Resurrection Narrative, derived from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.¹⁰⁴⁴ However, a few decades later, Schweizer¹⁰⁴⁵ and Ruckstuhl¹⁰⁴⁶ concluded that the stylistic cohesiveness of John indicated that the Gospel had only one author.¹⁰⁴⁷ Brown takes a “median position” that “Mark and John shared preGospel traditions, oral or written,” and while the evangelist had not seen Luke or Matthew, the redactor, the supposed author of the Epilogue, did see them in their final form. Both Dodd and Brown maintain that the Gospel of John went through three stages, or strata, of development: 1) Memories of Jesus and his works and teachings; 2) “Memories influenced by the life-experience of the Johannine community;” 3) The evangelist “shaped the tradition from the second stage into a written Gospel.”¹⁰⁴⁸ Therefore, according to Dodd, John and the Synoptics “constitute independent witnesses to Jesus, witnesses in which early tradition has been preserved and also undergone theological reflection as the message of Jesus was adapted to ongoing generations of believers.”¹⁰⁴⁹ Anderson also takes a middle position and maintains that the Johannine evangelist was influenced by pre-Markan oral tradition. The evangelist then wrote the Gospel around 80-85 CE in Ephesus, which quickly became beloved by the proto-Gnostics. This led to “Christological tensions”¹⁰⁵⁰ within the community and the penning of 1, 2, and 3 John between 85-95 CE. Finally, the redactor

¹⁰⁴⁴ Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 363. Brown mentions that Bultmann's reconstructed Greek Book of Signs is found in D.M. Smith, *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel* (Yale Univ., 1953).

¹⁰⁴⁵ See: Eduard Schweizer, *Ego Eimi* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939).

¹⁰⁴⁶ See: Eugen Ruckstuhl, *Die literarische Einheit des Johannesevangeliums* (Freiburg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg, 1951).

¹⁰⁴⁷ Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 365.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 363.; Ashton mentions eight stages of development. See: John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 163-166.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 363-364. Also see: C.H. Dodd., *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge Univ., 1953).

¹⁰⁵⁰ Paul N. Anderson, “On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John’s Christological Tensions,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 311-345.

completed the final version of John around 100 CE by perhaps adding chapter 1:1-18 (Prologue), chapter 6 (Eucharist Text), chapters 15-17 (Farewell Discourse), and chapter 21 (Epilogue).¹⁰⁵¹ This is also the position of Lindars except that he also considers the Lazarus narrative an addition to the text.¹⁰⁵² My position is similar to Schweizer in the sense that John had only one author, similar to Dodd in the sense that it is independent of the Synoptics,¹⁰⁵³ and similar to Dodd, Brown, and Anderson in the sense that the Gospel was shaped by the Johannine community's dialectical situation and Christological tensions. I agree with Anderson contra Bultmann that "John's christological tensions cannot be said to be a factor of literary dialogues between disparate literary sources. At the very least, they result from factors internal to the thinking of the Evangelist, who himself was a dialectical thinker instead of a monological one. Therefore, the tensions are meant to be there, and any attempt to eliminate them threatens to alter and distort the character of the Johannine witness."¹⁰⁵⁴ The Qur'an also had only one author (source) and was also shaped by the dialects, theological tensions, and crises of its initial community. When the Qur'an asks "its audience to believe, or to adopt a virtue," it is "providing an original model for dialectical theology,"¹⁰⁵⁵ its "divine exhortations reveal a polemical situation of considerable nuance."¹⁰⁵⁶ This "Dialogic Principle"¹⁰⁵⁷ certainly does not preclude the Gospel of John or the Qur'an as being revealed texts. This is just how God

¹⁰⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵² See: Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

¹⁰⁵³ As opposed to Barrett who believed John was dependent on Mark, "spiritualizing" the latter. See: C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd. Ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978).

¹⁰⁵⁴ Paul N. Anderson, "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John's Christological Tensions," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 319.

¹⁰⁵⁵ M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, "Qur'an and Hadith," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 31.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Khalid Blankinship, "The Early Creed," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 34.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, 37.

interacts with His creation. In Qur’anic studies, these “occasions of Revelation” are known as *Asbab al-nuzul* (أسباب النزول), and it constitutes a mandatory science to be studied by Muslim scholars in training.¹⁰⁵⁸

Historical Analysis: The Four Principles and their Significance for the Muslim Reader

Modern historical criticism of the Gospel of John involves engaging in pre-canonical/exegetical analysis of the Gospel in which its themes and contents are viewed as a product of its historical, that is to say, its theological, social, and cultural milieu. In other words, the Gospel must be situated within its historical context and examined as to how it is in dialogue with its initial audience. The impetus for such analysis will be the SMB belief in what I have called the *Injil* Archetype, the now (apparently) lost actual Revelation of God to Jesus, identified by al-Azami as Q1, which is reflected at times in the New Testament Synoptic Gospels, or the so-called *pseudo-injils*. This approach to John attempts to detangle the “historical Jesus” from the highly mystical Johannine Christ of the extended Book of Signs, or the “textual Jesus.” What would the Jesus of history look like if we applied the four principles of historiography explicated by Ehrman¹⁰⁵⁹ and Martin to the Book of Signs in relation to the Synoptics and with an eye on Islam’s theomystical tradition?

Principle One: The earlier the better. Historians tell us that John is very late compared to the Synoptics and therefore, not as historical. Only two of the seven “Signs” of John are mentioned in the earlier Synoptics (feeding of 5,000 [John 6:1-15] and

¹⁰⁵⁸ The seminal text of "Occasions" literature is that of al-Wahihi; see: *Al-Wahidi's Asbab al-Nuzul: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an*, vol. III. trans. by Mokrane Guezzou (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2008).

¹⁰⁵⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 122-126.

walking on water [John 6:16-25]). Troeltschian historical critics do not believe in miracles anyway, so these things never really happened in the first place according to them. Thus Jesus healing a man born blind and raising a man from the dead, *miracles affirmed in the Qur'an*, are completely unhistorical and fictitious. Principle Two: Multiple-Attestation. Leaving the miracles aside, the Johannine “I am statements” are not corroborated by the Synoptics and are therefore not historical, or at least not as historical as statements attributed to Jesus in the Synoptics. Similarly, the Qur’anic description of Jesus’ birth under a palm tree, only mentioned in the very late “apocryphal” Infancy Gospel of Matthew (also called The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew), is corroborated by neither the Lukan nor Matthean first-century nativity accounts. Therefore, by the same standard, the Qur’an’s birth narrative is not historical. Principle Three: Cutting against the grain. According to this principle, and according to historical critics, none of the highly mystical “divine” claims of Jesus are historical because they do not cut against the grain of what early Hellenistic Christians would have wanted to say about Jesus, namely, that he was a divine being. Thus Mark 10:18 is the “most historical” verse in the NT Gospels according to Martin, because Mark is early, the passage is paralleled by Matthew (19:18) and Luke (18:18), and it runs counter to the feelings of the Christians who wrote the text. Dunn says: “John clearly felt free to attribute to Jesus words and sentiments that Jesus himself probably never uttered while on earth.”¹⁰⁶⁰ This is of course assuming that the four evangelists believed Jesus to be a divinity or God himself, and also assuming that these texts could not have developed within a Jewish milieu. However Brown states: “The resemblance in vocabulary and thought between the DSS and John should banish

¹⁰⁶⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996) 119.

the idea that the Johannine tradition could not have developed on Palestinian soil.”¹⁰⁶¹

Moloney also points out that John’s unique knowledge of the topography of Jerusalem (Pool of Siloam, Sheep’s Gate, Portico of Solomon, Pool of Bethesda) and well as of Jewish Feasts (Sabbath, Passover, Dedication, Tabernacles) suggests an author that had spent considerable time there, perhaps even lived there. McGinn says: “To neglect the Jewish roots of Christian mysticism, and to see it, as many have done, as a purely Greek phenomenon, is to risk misconstruing an important part of its history.”¹⁰⁶² Nonetheless, according to Islamicist historical critics, the highly mystical *ahadith* attributed to Muhammad in which he reveals his reality (*al-haqiqatu ’l Mudammadiyya*), likewise do not cut against the grain of what early Sufis would want to have said about the Prophet, namely, that he is the “new Christ,” the cause of creation, the possessor of temporal priority over Adam, the Master of humanity, and the initial created light of God -

“Muhammadan I am statements” revered by the Sufis which reveal the Prophet’s role as *via ad Deum* as well as his station with his Lord using the explicit language of the Johannine Gospel. Principle Four: Social Context. Historical critics further claim that a first-century Galilean Rabbi, raised in a strict Jewish community, would never claim to be a deity and expect people to believe him as this would run counter to everything his society stood for. I agree. The problem with the critics here again is that they assume Jesus claimed deity. They also claim that the *traditional* evangelist, who was presumably an illiterate Nazarene fisherman,¹⁰⁶³ could not have possibly written the Gospel of John in which he displays a highly nuanced writing style, knowledge of Greek, and familiarity

¹⁰⁶¹ Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 373.

¹⁰⁶² Quoted in Alexander, *The Mystical Texts*, 138.

¹⁰⁶³ Cf. Acts 4:13.5 where John (the son of Zebedee) is called ἀγράμματος; “unable to write, illiterate.. also uneducated” (BDAG, 13).

with Hellenistic concepts such as the Logos. Furthermore, the presence of anachronisms, such as the appellation “the Jews,” for Jesus’ opponents, as well as the highly polemical statements attributed to Jesus, such as his condemnation of those who “believed him” in John 8, are obviously indicative of the theological tensions and controversies that were raging *at that time* (80-100 CE) in the Johannine community, *not at the time of Christ*. Thus the author of John probably had access to a “Signs Gospel”¹⁰⁶⁴ of some sort probably written around 50-60 CE, which was a straightforward narrative depicting (at least) seven miracles of Jesus, which served as the evangelist’s narrative framework. These Signs were then embellished and surrounded with lengthy mono/dialogues invented by the author and retroactively inserted into the mouth of Jesus in order to justify the high Christology of the former’s community. Likewise, an illiterate Arab man born in sixth-century Mecca could not have produced the finest piece of Arabic literature still in existence; he must have had help; he must have assimilated little known pre-Qur’anic Jewish/Christian narratives written/told in Arabic into a composite text which he self-styled a “Revelation” (وحي). Some of these texts/narrations may have included Talmudic passages, apocryphal Gospels (such as the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Proto-Evangelium of James), and legends such as *The Romance of Alexander* and the story of the Seven Sleepers. As you can see, SMBs who engage in this type of historical criticism are forced into finding a human source for *all* purported texts claiming to be inspired Revelation, because the underlying assumption of the Troeltschian historical

¹⁰⁶⁴ Robert Fortna attempted to reconstruct this document. See: Robert Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

critic is that revelation is a sham, prophets are charlatans or delusional, and miracles are fabricated. However, SMBs are *required* to believe in revelation, prophets, and miracles.

The “Extended” Book of Signs and the “Historical Jesus”

Given the Dialogic Principle as John being primarily a reflection of its theological context at the end of the first-century, the evangelist’s addition to the hypothetical Signs Gospel became John 1:1-12:49, hence my titling the *extended* Book of Signs - “extended” by the Johannine evangelist for theo-Christological reasons. What then can we confirm from the Extended Book of Signs as being “historical” according to Ehrman and Martin’s four principles of historiography? Not much at all; just a meagre Christological profile. According to Ehrman, Jesus was an “apocalypticist [who] anticipates that God would soon send a judge from heaven, whom he calls by the enigmatic designation ‘the Son of Man,’ who will wreak havoc among the forces of evil, destroying all that stands opposed to God and bringing in God’s good kingdom for those who have sided with God in this wicked age.”¹⁰⁶⁵ Of course Ehrman and Martin are not the only historians in the world. Both Robinson and Blomberg rigorously defend the historicity of John and contend that while John definitely has his own style and theo-Christological foci, the evangelist was an accurate historian, maybe even more accurate than the Synoptics.¹⁰⁶⁶ SMBs who reject the historicity of the Johannine “I am statements” on the grounds that they would have been mentioned by the Synoptics echo the argument of Maurice Casey¹⁰⁶⁷ who, in the words of Evans, “claims to possess evidence that constitutes what philosophers call a

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code*, 128.

¹⁰⁶⁶ See: John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1987), and Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁶⁷ See: Maurice Casey, *Is John’s Gospel True?* (London: Routledge, 1996).

defeater for my beliefs.”¹⁰⁶⁸ I agree with Evans who appeals to John’s high Christology being evidenced in Paul, while his style, once thought to be thoroughly Hellenistic, echoes that of the Jewish community at Qumran. Furthermore, the Synoptic authors certainly knew of statements attributed to Jesus by John but “perhaps considered this kind of information something their readers should know about only after they have come to know about Jesus and appreciate him... [these] statements *seemed* to compromise Jewish monotheism”¹⁰⁶⁹ (emphasis mine). John is radical, mystical, even docetic - *Sufic*. By John’s time, the Holy Spirit inspired full(er) disclosure of the person of Christ.

Who Wrote John?

As both a *Hagioichalist* and highly mystical Gospel, the beginnings of Johannine tradition can be traced back to the family of Jesus, namely, the Beloved Disciple and the brother of the Christ, James the Just (also called the Less), his mother Mary, his aunt Mary the wife of Clopas, and his wife Mary of Magdala. These four followed Jesus completely, were present at the cross (John 19:25-26), and inherited the great messianic secrets (mystical teachings). As stated earlier, James was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, but left him to follow Jesus whom he recognized as being the Messiah and “Savior” of Israel. According to the Gospel itself, the Beloved Disciple is its author: “This is the Disciple who witnesses concerning these things and who wrote (γράφας) these things, and we know well that his witness is true” (John 21:24). *James wrote the Gospel of John*; he is *al-Mulham*. Thus the *initial* “Johannine” community is in reality,

¹⁰⁶⁸ C. Stephen Evans, “The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 108.

¹⁰⁶⁹ *ibid*, 113.

the assembly (*ecclesia*) of Jesus and his immediate Disciples in Galilee and Jerusalem. Eisenman even contends, quite robustly, that the similarities between Qumran and John go far beyond what Charlesworth suggests or even what Ashton asserts, i.e. the Evangelist converted from Essenism.¹⁰⁷⁰ Eisenman's view is that the Scrolls' "Teacher of Righteousness" (*tsaddaqah*) is none other than James the Just (*HaTsaddiq*), the brother of Jesus, and that the community at Qumran was actually an early Jewish-Christian brotherhood.¹⁰⁷¹ This explains the shared terminology as well as the thematic correspondences between John and Qumran. However, I would not go that far since the person of Christ does not make any explicit appearances in the Scrolls while in John he is absolutely central. Interestingly, Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, claimed in his famous *Ecclesiastical History* that a group of Essenes known as the Therapeutae, or "Healers," wrote the Gospels and Epistles!¹⁰⁷²

There is no doubt that the "classical" Johannine commentaries of Hoskyns (1940), Bultmann (1941), Dodd (1953), Barrett (1955), and Lightfoot (1956) have been invaluable in their contributions to the study of John's Gospel,¹⁰⁷³ and continue to play a vital role in how we analyze the text with respect to its major themes, literary style, sources, etc. But as far as authorship goes, Brown notes a new trend in Johannine scholarship; a reassessment of John has emerged which dates the Gospel much earlier in

¹⁰⁷⁰ John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 237.

¹⁰⁷¹ See: Robert Eisenman, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians: Essays and Translations* (Nashville: Grave Distractions, 1996); *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians, and Qumran: A New Hypothesis of Qumran Origins* (Nashville: Grave Distractions, 1986); *James the Brother of Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Historical James, Paul the Enemy, and Jesus' Brothers as Apostles* (Nashville: Grave Distractions, 2012).

¹⁰⁷² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.17.

¹⁰⁷³ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, xxi.

the first century and places John squarely within the locus of Palestinian Judaism.¹⁰⁷⁴ The magnificent discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran have certainly contributed to this trend. Anderson notes that various expressions, themes, and concepts in the DSS are also found in John, thus placing the latter's content into a very useful context.¹⁰⁷⁵ These themes include ancient Jewish prayers for protection from demons (Stuckenbruck),¹⁰⁷⁶ Second-Temple Jewish understandings of the world (Charlesworth),¹⁰⁷⁷ water rituals (Harrington),¹⁰⁷⁸ and the revelation of "mystery" (Ashton).¹⁰⁷⁹ Echoing the comments of Brown previously mentioned, Harris says: "Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered,¹⁰⁸⁰ many scholars believed that John's Gospel, with its seemingly Platonic dualism and use of Greek philosophical terms such as Logos, originated on a Hellenistic environment, perhaps in Ephesus....,"¹⁰⁸¹ however due to the similarities between Essence and Johannine thought, "many scholars fix the Gospel's place of composition (at least its first edition) in Palestine or Syria."¹⁰⁸² Harris further states that "recent studies indicate

¹⁰⁷⁴ *ibid*, xxii-xxiii. Brown says: "Consequently, since the Second World War there has emerged what Bishop John A.T. Robinson calls a 'new look' in Johannine studies - a new look that shares much with the look once traditional in Christianity. The dating of the Gospel has been moved back to the end of the 1st century or even earlier. A historical tradition underlying the Fourth Gospel similar to the traditions underlying the Synoptic Gospels is being posited by some... And perhaps strangest of all, some scholars are even daring to suggest once more that John son of Zebedee may have had something to do with the Gospel. This reversal of trend, however, does not mean that all the intervening critical scholarship has been in vain. Scholarship cannot return to pre-critical days, nor should it ever be embarrassed by the fact that it learns through mistakes. Indeed, it is the admirable honesty of biblical criticism and its ability to criticize itself that has led to a more conservative estimation of the historical value of the Fourth Gospel."

¹⁰⁷⁵ Mary L. Coloe and Tom Thatcher Eds., *John, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years Discovery and Debate* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), See chapter entitled, "John and Qumran: Discovery and Interpretation over Sixty Years" by Paul Anderson, 15-32.

¹⁰⁷⁶ *ibid*, 139-160 ("Protection from the Evil One (John 17:15): Light from the Dead Sea Scrolls" by Loren Stuckenbruck).

¹⁰⁷⁷ *ibid*, 161-182 ("The Fourth Evangelist and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Assessing Trends over Nearly Sixty Years" by James H. Charlesworth).

¹⁰⁷⁸ *ibid*, 117-138 ("Purification in the Fourth Gospel in Light of Qumran" by Hannah K. Harrington).

¹⁰⁷⁹ *ibid*, 53-68 ("'Mystery' in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Fourth Gospel" by John Ashton).

¹⁰⁸⁰ At Qumran, Palestine in 1945.

¹⁰⁸¹ Harris, *The New Testament, A Student's Introduction*, 189.

¹⁰⁸² *ibid*.

that John's Gospel is deeply rooted in Palestinian tradition,"¹⁰⁸³ contains multiple Aramaisms, and in agreement with Moloney, Harris states that John demonstrates greater knowledge of Palestinian geography as well as "first-century Palestinian Judaism"¹⁰⁸⁴ than the Synoptics. Furthermore, while historical critics tend to characterize John's Gospel as unhistorical, most of these scholars agree with John's length of Jesus' ministry (three years) and his date of crucifixion.¹⁰⁸⁵ It was the promised Paraclete, the Holy Spirit of prophecy/revelation,¹⁰⁸⁶ that revealed to James the speeches of Jesus as the latter actually uttered them and empowered James "to create a Gospel that fully portrays Jesus' glory"¹⁰⁸⁷ via a narrative in Greek whose style appeals to both Jew and Gentile - "And behold! I *revealed* to the Disciples, 'Believe in Me and in my Sent One (رسولي)'" (Q 5:111); "Believe in (*the*) God; also in *me* believe" (πιστεύετε εἰς τὸν θεόν καὶ εἰς ἐμὲ πιστεύετε [John 14:1.9]). This is why James is the Leader of the Apostles according to Acts, because he was universally recognized as chief heir of the messianic teaching authority, thus both Peter and Paul report to him (Acts 12:7-17; cc. 15, 21). He was the *Qutb* (Axial Sage) of his age and "unique Christic man" (ألفرد العيساوي) who represented the very extension of Christ's presence on earth, just as Husayn was in relation to the Prophet Muhammad - "Husayn is from me, and *I am from Husayn*" (حسين مني وأنا من حسين).¹⁰⁸⁸ The second half of the *hadith* intimates that Husayn is the very extension of the Muhammadan actions and ethics. To put it in Johannine terms based on John 15:4, "Husayn remains in Muhammad, and Muhammad remains in Husayn."

¹⁰⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 194. This is as opposed to one year (Clement and Origen) based upon the Synoptics.

¹⁰⁸⁶ See the next chapter for a greater treatment of the Paraclete and its significance to the Qur'an.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Harris, *The New Testament, A Student's Introduction*, 207.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Hadith* of Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah.

As far as dating is concerned, most secular historians,¹⁰⁸⁹ like Barrett,¹⁰⁹⁰ date the Gospel of John to 90-100 CE as a *terminus post quem* and 140 CE as a *terminus ante quem*, for three principle reasons: 1) It wasn't until this time (late first and early second centuries) that "Christians" (Christic Jews) were being driven out of synagogues, and there was a definitive break between Christians and Jews; 2) The Gospel doesn't bother to mention the highly significant destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, thus historians assume that it was authored twenty or thirty years later, after the "shock and awe" had subsided; 3) Early Christology was constantly evolving (Dunn),¹⁰⁹¹ and John's Christology is far too advanced for first-century Palestinian Christianity (F.C. Bauer). With respect to the first reason, such excommunication (ἄποσυνάγωγος) is highly likely to have taken place in Jerusalem (as stated in John 9:22), as I stated earlier, both during the life of Christ, due to his cleansing of the Temple and clashes with local religious authorities, as well as after his ascension during the period of the *initial* "Johannine" apostolic community. Thus the Dialogic Principle of John remains intact, as the contents of the Gospel being revealed to James, containing powerful literary devices,¹⁰⁹² have direct relevance to what was happening in Jerusalem during *his* time, viz., "partial" or conditional faith in Jesus as the Messiah, charges of heresy against the Christic movement, questions of Jesus' legitimacy and pedigree, Samaritans and Greeks entering the fold, persecution of the Disciples, etc., *all of these were addressed or predicted by*

¹⁰⁸⁹ For analysis about dating, see: Brown, *The Gospel of John*, LXXXI-LXXXVI.

¹⁰⁹⁰ C.K. Barrett., *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 108.

¹⁰⁹¹ See: James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996) 64.

¹⁰⁹² These literary devices include, according to Anderson: "overstatement, understatement, irony, prolepses, narratorial asides, and especially the Johannine misunderstanding dialogue." See: Paul N. Anderson, "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John's Christological Tensions," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 326.

Jesus during his life, and the believers are “reminded” (ὑπομνήσει [see: John 14:26]) of them by James via the Paraclete thus giving Jesus’ words a renewed sense of significance. “Indeed, the failure to see the Evangelist’s thinking as dialogical is one of the foundational mistakes continuing to be made by Johannine interpreters.”¹⁰⁹³ As for the second reason, it is an *argumentum ex silentio* that can just as well be used to make the opposite contention, i.e. that John was written early, so early in fact that the Temple was still standing at the time. In fact, confessional scholars who believe in Revelation, such as W. Hall Harris, Robinson, Morris, Cribbs, Wenham, Wallace, *et al* date the composition of the Gospel of John to 55-70 CE¹⁰⁹⁴ for these and other reasons, although early dating of John is by no means exclusive to confessional scholarship. Related to the Temple evidence is the usage of the verb ἔστιν and the participle ἔχουσα in John 5:2, denoting the present stative:

(1) After these things, it was (ἦν [imperfect]) the festival of the Jews so 'Isa went up (ἀνέβη [aorist]) into Jerusalem. (2) And in Jerusalem *there is* (ἔστιν) a pool called *Bethesda* in Hebrew, near the sheep gate, and *has* (ἔχουσα) five porches. (3) On these (porches) a multitude of feeble people: blind, disabled, and paralyzed used to lie down (κατέκειτο [imperfect]).

Thus the pool and porches were still intact at the time of the Gospel’s composition.

According to Wallace, however, the majority of NT scholars (Schnackenburg,

Knabenbauer, Carson, *et al.*)¹⁰⁹⁵ interpret ἔστιν as a *historical present* - “when the present tense of a verb is used to describe a past tense action or event. It is commonly used

¹⁰⁹³ Paul N. Anderson, “On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John’s Christological Tensions,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 326.

¹⁰⁹⁴ See: Stegall: http://www.chafer.edu/files/v14no2_date_of_john_s_gospel.pdf; Leon Morris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 34-35; idem, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, 283-92. W. Hall Harris, *The Gospel of John: Introduction and Commentary* (n.p.: Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 18; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 531.

John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1987) 91.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar, Beyond the Basics*, 531.

throughout the four Gospels to provide a heightened sense of action or vividness to a scene.”¹⁰⁹⁶ Wallace is adamant, however, that classifying ἔστιν as a historical present in this particular verse is severely problematic.¹⁰⁹⁷

It is my contention that the traditional dating of John by most secular historians is much too late. It was highly influenced by Baur, who through a Hegelian framework, assumed John to represent the synthesis of Paul and the Synoptics.¹⁰⁹⁸ If we assume Jamsonian authorship, according to Hegesippus and Origen, the murder of James by the Pharisees eventually led to the Roman siege of Jerusalem ordered by Vespasian in 70 CE as a form of divine retribution.¹⁰⁹⁹ The grace period initiated by Jesus’ selfless sacrifice of his life in order to postpone the immediate destruction of the Jewish nation had ended; Israel’s hour had come. With this said, the autograph composition of the Gospel of John cannot be later than 69 CE, although many scholars date James’ death to around 62 CE based on the *Antiquities* of Josephus. In my view, after the death of James and destruction of the Temple, the “Johannine” (Jamsonian) authority relocated to Ephesus, in western Turkey, *a city whose Christian believers are praised in the Qur’an*,¹¹⁰⁰ within a celebrated *surah* the recitation of which will protect against the tribulation of the *Antichrist* (al-Masih al-Dajjal [المسيح الدجال]) according to the Prophet.¹¹⁰¹ A student of James, who could have even been a very young Disciple of Jesus (albeit not of the

¹⁰⁹⁶ See: Stegall: http://www.chafer.edu/files/v14no2_date_of_john_s_gospel.pdf. Wallace lists other approaches adopted by NT scholars in order to “circumvent the prima facie force of ἔστιν: 1) it is anomalous (McNeile); 2) it is an error (Bleek?); 3) the pool survived the war (Plummer, Dods, Weiss); 4) the redactional view: John 5:2 belonged to an earlier stratum of the Gospel, only to go uncorrected in the final publication (MacGregor, Brown?).” Wallace, *Greek Grammar, Beyond the Basics*, 531.

¹⁰⁹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹⁸ Brown, *The Gospel of John*, LXXX.

¹⁰⁹⁹ John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Fortress Press, 1997), 205.

¹¹⁰⁰ See next chapter. The Qur’an relates the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Q 18:8-22.

¹¹⁰¹ “Whoever recites the first ten *ayat* of *al-Kahf* will be protected from the *fitnah* of the Antichrist” (*Hadith* of Muslim).

twelve), or even the traditional John the son of Zebedee, became the new head of the now Ephesian Jamsonian brotherhood that scholars today call the “Johannine community.”

There is even some evidence to suggest that Mary (mother of Christ), being a pillar of the Christic *Hagioikos*, migrated to Ephesus as well (presumably with John), as the famous *Meryem Ana Evi* (Turk.) sits atop Mt. Koressos and remains to this day a pilgrimage site for Christians, including several Popes, and many Muslims.¹¹⁰² Greek Orthodox tradition also maintains that Mary of Magdala, another pillar of the Holy Christic House, settled and eventually died in Ephesus.¹¹⁰³ Although I am inclined to say that the Gospel had only one author, I concede that John 21 could have been appended to the Gospel by this disciple in Ephesus around 85-90 CE. This “Elder,” as he is sometimes called, ends the Gospel by stating that the (message of the) Beloved Disciple will continue to follow Jesus and “remain” until the Parousia (21:23), whereas (the message of) Peter will be clothed (in falsehood) and forced to go where he does not want (it) to go (21:18).¹¹⁰⁴ Thus throughout the centuries, while Peter has been associated with the Trinitarian Catholic Church, James’ strongest association has always been with unitarian Nazareanism, or

¹¹⁰² The site was reportedly seen in a vision by the Blessed Anne Emmerich (d.1824), an Augustinian nun whose description of Mother Mary’s House was identical to the site in Ephesus. However, Ephesus appears to have been linked to Mary long before this as the Council of Ephesus (431 CE) was held there which bestowed on her the title of *theotokos*.

¹¹⁰³ See: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09761a.htm>

¹¹⁰⁴ Tabor suggests that the Gospel of John was written later while based on traditions that originated with James, whom Tabor believes is the Beloved Disciple. See: Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty, The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*, 153-170. I do not see a major problem with this theory; it is certainly possible that Irenaeus was correct and the apostle John the son of Zebedee, being the student of James, emigrated to Ephesus and wrote the entire Gospel under inspiration from the Paraclete around 75-85 CE. Brown also favors an Ephesian authorship (Brown, *The Gospel of John*, CIII-CIV). Thus in John 21:24, John is simply *attributing* the teachings of the Gospel to his teacher, James, and does not intend a literal meaning of the verb “wrote.” SMBs object to this authorship theory on the grounds that John is called “illiterate” or “unlearned” (ἀγράμματος) in Acts 4:13. Have they heard of Muhammad, the *unlettered* prophet? Certainly God could have inspired John. However, Harris raises an objection by noting that Jesus predicted the martyrdom of John and his brother James (the Great) in Mark 10:39, and that this actually occurred according to Acts 12:1-13. However the text is clear that only James (the Great) was executed by Agrippa, not his brother John. See: Harris, *The New Testament, A Student’s Introduction*, 188.

original Christic-Judaism. And it is this original or “proto-Johannine” (Jamsonian) tradition and teaching that the Qur’an is affirming and reinvigorating with its many intertextual references and allusions to the Gospel of John, the most comprehensive representative of the *Injil* of Jesus Christ. For example, on the level of *ta’wil*, it is just interesting to note that *Surah Maryam* (chapter 19) in the Qur’an contains the names of all members of Christ’s initial *Hagioikos* listed in the pivotal passage of John 19:23-27 (also chapter 19): Jesus/’*Isa* (عيسى), Q 19:34; Mary/*Maryam* (مريم): the names of Jesus’ mother, aunt, and wife, Q 19:16; James/*Ya’qub* (يعقوب), Q 19:6; even James’ student called “the Elder” and traditional namesake of the Gospel: John/*Yahya/Hanana* (يحيى) or (حنان), Q 19:7, 14. At the birth scene, we encounter “food from above” and a “spring from below,” (Q 19:24-25); after the nativity narrative, the Qur’an records Jesus making his famous Qur’anic “I am statement” (Q 19:30) and refers to Jesus (if we take the nominative reading [Qurtubi]) as “the Word of Truth” (قول الحق [Q 19:34]), the Johannine Logos.

Concerning the third reason for assuming a later date, that John’s Christology is simply too advanced for the first-century, Bousset’s *Kyrios Christos* (1913) and much more recently, Hurtado’s excellent monograph on the subject of Christ-devotion in earliest Christianity rigorously challenges this notion.¹¹⁰⁵ Looking into the earliest NT books, such as Paul’s (undisputed) letter to the Philippians, possibly written as early as 56 CE (Brown;¹¹⁰⁶ 60-62 CE, Harris¹¹⁰⁷), we read: “(Jesus Christ) who, being in the form

¹¹⁰⁵ See: Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

¹¹⁰⁶ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 484.

¹¹⁰⁷ Harris, *The New Testament*, 264-265.

(*morphe*) of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phil 2:6).¹¹⁰⁸ This is part of Paul’s “Christological Hymn.” Although many Trinitarians interpret such statements as denoting the unqualified deity of Christ, which from a Muslim theo-mystical position is obviously erroneous, and despite what one might think of Paul, the point made is unequivocal: early forms of Christianity espoused a very high Christology. Brown says: “If the hymn is incarnational and was phrased in Aramaic in the 30s, *the highest type of NT Christology was articulated early indeed*”¹¹⁰⁹ (emphasis mine). In this case, I am not convinced that Paul believes that Jesus is essentially God; this passage must be understood in the context of theomorphic, non-essential/theositic mystical union, sanctified human agency, and *thelemic* submission. Nonetheless, the passage is very “high,” and it is very early. I would submit that the Qur’anic view of the *Injil* of Jesus is one that teaches a very high Christology as well. Jesus is the “word of Him (God)” (كلمته), a “Sign unto mankind” (آية للناس), and a “mercy from Us” (رحمة منا), “among the beloved Near Ones” (من المقربين), who teaches his people to be “lordly/divinized” (ربانيين), coupled with the fact that the only other person called by the anarthrous “mercy/*rahma*” (by God) in the Qur’an is the Prophet Muhammad in the iconic Q 21:107. Along with Christ’s prophecy of Ahmad in Q 61:6 (identifiable *only* with the *Johannine* Paraclete according to Ibn Hisham and even Ahmed Deedat), all of these things testify to the premise that Jesus’ status (مقام) with God according to the Qur’an is comparable to his status with God in the Gospel of John.

With respect to *hadith* literature, Western Islamicists such as Goldziher, Muir, Schacht, *et al.*, also claim that most, if not all *ahadith* are second or third-century

¹¹⁰⁸ NKJV translation.

¹¹⁰⁹ Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 493.

forgeries, which reflected the legal or doctrinal controversies of their time. Thus *ahadith* that exemplify a very high Muhammadan prophetology, such as the Johannine-esque *hadith qudsi*: “Indeed I created the world only in order to acquaint them with your honor and rank with Me. If it were not for you, I would have not created the world”¹¹¹⁰ or “Indeed *I am* only a gifted mercy”¹¹¹¹ - despite their *isnads* as strong or sound, are rejected outright by these critics citing that they simply could not have been uttered by the “historical” Muhammad; they are the products of an advanced *Muhammadology* that evolved in response to opposition many decades after the Prophet’s demise, and were then retroactively placed into the mouth of Muhammad. But as J. Brown points out, Goldziher and his ilk make a critical assumption that if a *hadith* serves the interests of a particular group, then it must have been forged by that group.¹¹¹² Thus when SMBs, in agreement with Ehrman¹¹¹³ and Dunn¹¹¹⁴ assent to the presence of an “evolving” Christology within the NT Gospels, and that Mark’s “simple” beliefs about Jesus as Hidden Messiah must be given precedence over John’s “contrived” Logos Christology, they are essentially undercutting their own Islamic theo-Christological teaching by their implication that the four Gospels of the NT are nothing more than manmade fictions at worst, or the (oxymoronic) “corrupted words of God” at best, that are nonetheless partially affirmed in the Qur’an, yet with the *most* “contrived,” the Gospel of John, taking center-stage (?) The Gospels *do* evolve in their Christology, but not because they are the

¹¹¹⁰ Imam Yusuf al-Nabahani, *The Virtues of the Prophet and His Nation*, translation and notes by Jameer, 36.

¹¹¹¹ *ibid*, 48.

¹¹¹² Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith, Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (New York: Oneworld, 2009), 205-206.

¹¹¹³ See: Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God, The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 353-372.

¹¹¹⁴ See: James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd edition.

artificial machinations of men who falsely attributed statements to Jesus after the latter's departure in order to "one-up" their theological opponents; the Gospels evolve because they are carefully and masterfully revealing Christ to their readers and listeners, written by inspired hands, and exuding from inspired hearts. By the time we get to John, the great messianic secret (μυστήριον) that the Synoptics were building towards, and what Paul spoke of as early as Col. 1:27, is finally made manifest: Mystical union in Christ leading to union with God. Besides, Mark hardly has a simple belief: Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea (Mk 4:29)!

Proposed Timeline of (proto-)Johannine/Jamsonian Tradition:

30-33 CE: Oral teaching of the Gospel by Jesus Christ in Syriac, Greek, Hebrew(?); teaching is revealed (Level I & II) by God to Jesus. Being a prophet, *all* words of Jesus are technically Revelation. Jesus appoints his brother James as his spiritual heir and teaching authority before his death.

33-60? CE: Oral proclamation (*kerygma*) of the principal teachings of the Gospel in Syriac and Greek in Palestine and surrounding areas via apostolic mission. James the Just is Leader of the "mother *ecclesia*" in Jerusalem.

60-62? CE: Holy Spirit inspires James to write (or dictate) the Gospel ("of John") in Jerusalem in Greek (Level III Revelation [إحياء] containing Level I and II [وحي] statements of Christ). This, along with the Synoptics, constitute the *Injil*-Archetype: an authentic capturing of the *ethos* of the message of Jesus Christ. James is executed by the Sanhedrin around 62-65? CE.

70-75? CE: A Jamsonian disciple, John the son of Zebedee, or an unnamed Disciple of Jesus, relocates the special community (probably including both Marys [Mother and Wife]) of the *Christic Hagioikos* to Ephesus,¹¹¹⁵ Asia Minor, where (possibly) "the

¹¹¹⁵ According to Acts, Paul lived in Ephesus for some time, approximately three years (52-54 CE) according to NT scholars. However, his supposed letter to the Ephesians, which Dodd called "the crown of Paulism," is considered pseudonymous by 80% of critical scholarship (Brown) for good reasons. Internal evidence (vocab, style, theology) suggest that a later disciple in the Pauline tradition penned the letter in the 90s. Most striking is the lack of Paul's signature motif of an immediate *Parousia* of Christ. Rather the author "gives voice to a realized eschatology wherein the community consists of married families" (Brown, 636). It is also very interesting to note that the oldest and most reliable MSS of Paul's letter to the Ephesians do not contain the phrase "in Ephesus" (ἐν Ἐφέσῳ) in Ephesians 1:1 (P46, x, B, 1739), and that the MSS of Origen, Basil, and (probably) Marcion actually read "to the Laodiceans" (Brown, 626; Metzger, 532). Perhaps the letter was meant as a "circular letter" in which any given community could be addressed, or perhaps the addition of "in Ephesus" was meant to give an impression of doctrinal unity between the Johannine (essentially Jamsonian) school and the Pauline school, given the thesis that the Johannine

Elder,” through Level III disclosure, appends the Gospel with the Epilogue (c. 21). Ephesus had a considerable Jewish, Jewish-Christian, Gentile-Christian, and Pagan population.

Starting c. 75 CE: Internal strife grips the Johannine community leading to theo-Christological differences and obfuscations. Proto-gnostic as well as proto-orthodox beliefs begin to emerge and proliferate, while the name of James continues to be associated with Jewish-Christianity (Jewish messianism). Eventually proto-orthodoxy becomes the dominant position.

250 CE: Trajan Decius begins massive persecution of Christians of Ephesus. Seven Christian youth flee to a cave near Mt. Pion and remain there miraculously for generations.

C. 450? CE:¹¹¹⁶ Sleepers awake during reign of Theodosius II¹¹¹⁷ *postquam* the Councils of Nicea I (325 CE) & Constantinople I (381 CE). Trinitarian *homoousion* Christianity is now the official state religion.

610 CE: Qur’anic Revelation (Level I) and *ahadith* of Muhammad (Level II) restore the essential *ethos* of the *princeps* Gospel Archetype, a restoration of the proto-Johannine (Jamsonian) tradition, and confirmation of the Gospel of John.

والله أعلم.

Tatian’s Diatessaron: The Qur’an’s “Injil?”

There is something else that the SMBs must contend with that is quickly becoming a major topic of discussion in light of the Corpus Coranicum’s “Dialogic Principle,” i.e. the Qur’an as a product of the theological debates raging in the Arabian Peninsula in Late Antiquity, and the “Post-Orientalist Cosmopolitan Approach” to the sacred text of the Muslims as articulated by Ernst. Shortly after the death of Justin Martyr, his student, the Assyrian Tatian (d. 175 CE), wrote his magnificent *Diatessaron*

community settled in Ephesus and that the Gospel of John emphasizes a realized eschatology over a future eschatology, although the latter is not entirely lacking from the Gospel. Thus addressing the letter to the Ephesians was seen as an effective way of smoothing over tensions between Paul and James, especially since Paul identifies his agitators as being “men from James” (τινας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου [Gal. 2:12.5]).

¹¹¹⁶ The Qur’an’s span of 300 or 309 years may simply be what many people were conjecturing at that time in Arabia.

¹¹¹⁷ “Tidhusis” (al-Tabari, *Jami’ al-Bayan*).

(δία τεσσάρων) in Syriac, the “Fourfold Gospel” as Bruce calls it.¹¹¹⁸ This Gospel Harmony wove together all four canonical Gospels into a single chronological narrative and “may well have been the best known form of the Gospel among the Arabic-speaking Christians in the Qur'an's milieu, whose patristic and liturgical heritage was largely Syriac.”¹¹¹⁹ In fact, “the *gospel of John* provided the framework into which material from the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke was fitted”¹¹²⁰ (emphasis mine). The text begins with John 1:1-5 (Jesus as Logos) but then “cuts away” to the birth narrative of John the Baptist in Luke 1:5-80. As if to almost confirm Tatian's ordering, the Qur'an tells us *during the birth narrative of John* that the Baptist witnesses concerning a “word from Him” (كلمة منه [Q 3:45.5]), meaning the Logos of God. Griffith contends that in spite of Tatian's Harmony being eventually denounced in the early fourth century and replaced by the “separated Gospels” of the *Pshitta*, the Diatessaron continued to hold massive influence over many Middle-Eastern churches especially in Syria and Egypt even after the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries.¹¹²¹ In fact, the oldest extant complete copy of the Diatessaron is in *Arabic*,¹¹²² penned by the Baghdadi polymath Abu'l Faraj 'Abd Allah Ibn al-Tayyib (d. 1043 CE).¹¹²³ Al-Tayyib began his translation from the Syriac into

¹¹¹⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 124. For a profound analysis of the Diatessaron see: William L. Peterson, *Tatian's Diaterraron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Supplement to *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 25; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994).

¹¹¹⁹ Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 141.

¹¹²⁰ Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 127.

¹¹²¹ Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*, 142.

¹¹²² Although most scholars prefer an original (autograph) Syriac composition, the oldest extant Greek manuscript of the Diatessaron is dated to the third-century and was found at Dura-Europos on the Euphrates (catalogued as Uncial 0212), and contains the “parallel passages:” Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49-51; John 19:38. Bruce cites (in no. 38 [pg. 128]): C.H. Kraeling, *A Greek Fragment of Tatian's Diatessaron from Dura = Studies and Documents*, 3 (London, 1935).

¹¹²³ The original publication of al-Tayyib: A. Ciasca, *Tatiani Evangeliorum Harmoniae Arabice nunc primum ex duplici codice editit et translatione Latina donavit P. Augustinus Ciasca* (Romae: Ex

Arabic with the Christian *basmalah* formula: “In the Name of the One God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to whom belongs the glory forever” (بسم الله الواحد الاب والابن والروح)¹¹²⁴. (القدس له المجد دائما

Therefore, and very interestingly, the SMB’s constant demand for a single “Gospel” (since the Qur'an speaks of “the Gospel” not “Gospels”), and written in Jesus' vernacular (Syriac), actually plays into the hands of the Qur'an's critics who assert that Muhammad considered Tatian's composite Diatessaron to be the *Injil*! - since it is *one* Gospel (Syr. *Ewangeliyon Damhallte* [“Gospel of the Mixed”]), written in Syriac, and was also very influential in the churches of the Middle East at the time of the Prophet. According to Quispel¹¹²⁵ and Bruce,¹¹²⁶ Tatian may have even woven in a fifth Gospel, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where a light manifests at Jesus' baptism. Of course in this Gospel, James the Just is highly magnified and according to Jerome, Tatian may have rejected several of the Pauline epistles as well,¹¹²⁷ thus reinforcing the Paul vs. James paradigm documented in the early church by Paul himself in his letter to the Galatians, and *seized upon* by SMBs. However, as I have contended, the Gospels were revealed separately and in *Greek*, and as we have demonstrated with John, if we should unstitch Johannine pericopes, sacred narrative, and other textual units, and weave in the

Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888). The Arabic text begins with the following preamble followed by John 1:1-5: "We begin with the assistance of God, the Most High, in the composition of the pure Gospel and radiant garden called the Diatessaron (دياطاسارون) as well as an exegesis of this Quaternary. The compiler of this (text) was Tatian the Greek (طيطنوس اليوناني) taken from the four evangelists: Matthew the Chosen (المصطفى), whose symbol will be "M;" Mark the Selected (المجتبى), whose symbol will be "R;" Luke the Amiable (المرتضى), whose symbol will be "Q;" and John the Beloved (الحبيب), whose symbol will be "H." It was rendered from Syriac into Arabic by the distinguished learned priest Abu'l Faraj 'Abd Allah b. al-Tayyib, may God be pleased with him. He commenced by saying, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus, the Son of the Living God" (al-Tayyib, *Diatess*, 1).

¹¹²⁴ al-Tayyib, *Diatess*, 1.

¹¹²⁵ See: G. Quiapel, *Tatian and the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden, 1975).

¹¹²⁶ Bruce *The Canon of Scripture*, 127-128.

¹¹²⁷ Jerome, *Comm. on Titus*, preface.

Synoptics, we end up compromising the incredible internal structure and cohesiveness of its autograph composition, i.e. we compromise its *revelatory style*. Tatian's work is sacred. It is a translation of the meanings of the true *Injil* contained in the Greek Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and while it is *possible* that the Qur'an has this text in mind when it alludes to the *Injil*, due to its apparent popularity in that region, Tatian's text is not the original. It has an *Archetype*: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Tatian's translation and harmonization contains the *accurate message* of the Gospel placed in chronological sequence by a brilliant *mujtahid*, however, the Greek Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John not only contain the accurate message of the Gospel, but is the *very Revelation of God*. What Tatian has done with the four Gospels is similar to what Ernst claims happened to some of the Meccan chapters of the Qur'an, i.e. Medinan *ayat* were eventually spliced into Meccan *suwar* as explanatory passages, moralizing conclusions, or exceptions to generalities (such as Q 74:31),¹¹²⁸ but in doing so, the internal symmetry and structure of the *suwar* become compromised and a listener has failed to experience the Qur'an like the Companions themselves did. The major difference, however, is that while it can be convincingly argued that these Medinan additions were placed into Meccan chapters by the Prophet himself, since there is no *external* (textual) evidence of structural difference within the *suwar*, Tatian performed his work long after the death of the Apostles of Jesus Christ.

¹¹²⁸ Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, 94-98.

Final Ruling

As Muslims, we have *Iman*; we believe in Revelation. According to the Qur'an, the Gospel is a Revelation from God. Muslims who engage in the *Injil* Archetype textually-critical theo-mystical Muslim approach to the Gospel of John, no doubt feel compelled to do so because of their interpretation of the Qur'an's statements, i.e. that the Bible is *textually* corrupt, but by doing so, they unfortunately often repeat the flawed *a priori* assumptions of unbelieving, secular historical critics; the same critics who characterize the Qur'an as a textually aberrant, uninspired amalgamation of pre-Islamic Paganism and apocryphal Christian and Jewish legends. However, in most cases, SMBs are not even willing to engage such accusations with respect to their Scripture. When it comes to the New Testament, non-religious historical scholars who take positions that confessing Christians would welcome, i.e. early dating of John, revelatory style, textual cohesiveness, etc., are almost summarily ignored by SMBs because they have made up their minds that John stands in contradiction to the Qur'an and again, it is textually corrupt. My contention, however, is that a closer examination of the Qur'an's statements reveals that God preserves His words - *all of them*; no one can change them so that the original *ethos* of the written text should remain irreparably damaged. This includes the Gospel. The severe censure of the Qur'an is not operating under an assumption that the Gospel was corrupted in its *text* (نص), but rather a condemnation of scribes who “(erroneously) transcribe the Bible with their right hands,” and say “This is from God.” Evidence was shown that while various “post-John period” scribes with diverse theological leanings *attempted* to infiltrate the text of the Gospel with their respective textual aberrations, God preserved His words via the scholastic community! Even if the

Gospel of John was championed by proto-orthodox/orthodox elements, this document faithfully and authentically delivers to us the life, teachings, and person of Jesus Christ, the Messenger of God. Why? Because the Qur'an *time and again* engages intertextually with John by way of both allusion and "critical rewriting" in order to *remind* the *Ahl al-Injil* of the teachings of Christ, because they "forgot a portion of it" (فَنَسُوا حَظًّا [Q 5:14.5]), as well as providing the readers of the *Injil* with a proper *tawhid*-oriented theo-mystical lens by which they might (once again) properly understand Christ's teachings as they have preserved them. We believe in God. Would the Qur'an refer to the Christians as the "People of the *Gospel*," insist upon the proper understanding of the "*Gospel*" as a gateway to belief in Muhammad - the one who confirms "what came before him," - and describe the "*Gospel*" as "guidance" (الهدى), if the Gospel was corrupted beyond recognition or altogether lost? If the true Gospel is lost, then what are we to make of *multiple* sound (صحيح) *ahadith* in Bukhari that state that Waraqah b. Nawfal, Khadijah's cousin, "used to write the Gospel (الإنجيل) in Arabic (بالعربية) and Hebrew/Syriac (بالعبرانية)"? Did Waraqah have access to the Archetype? If not, what is he writing? Q1? The answer is the New Testament.

The Qur'an further censures those who *say*: "Indeed Allah is Jesus, the son of Mary" (Q 5:17.1) and "Indeed Allah is one of three (in a Trinity)" (Q 5:73.1). It was the post-apostolic, proto-orthodox church Fathers who began to think of Jesus as being God, culminating in the Synods at Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon, *et al.*, where the Messiah, Logos, and figurative "Son of God" evolved into the literal "God the Son," co-substantial with the Father and Holy Spirit, and possessing two natures. If oral or written *tahrif* of various pericopes and stories of Jesus occurred during the "*pre*-John

period” (by word of mouth or of a text like the primitive Book of Signs), the kind of Jesus we are left with after we apply the four principles of modern secular historiography as espoused by Ehrman and Martin to John 1:1-12:50 is hardly the Qur’anic Jesus: the miraculously conceived, miracle-working, spiritual Master, who ascended to heaven! SMBs who intend to detangle the “textual (NT Gospel) Jesus”¹¹²⁹ from his acquired “twisted mythology”¹¹³⁰ in order to arrive at the *true* Jesus, will only arrive at a spiritually anemic *historical Jesus*: a poor Galilean peasant who mistakenly believed himself to be a prophet of sorts, and whose ministry utterly failed with his execution. Have the SMBs forgotten that Revelation, sacred *History*, trumps history? Have they forgotten that God inspires men with respect to His Will? Have they forgotten the metaphysical, ... *Faith*? Besides, at the end of the day, the existence of the primitive Book of Signs is only theoretical, the SMBs argument is thoroughly *ex silentio*, and most importantly, *they have failed to uncover the Injil Archetype*. Therefore, due to its more honorable treatment of the Bible, as well as its “explanatory power,” given the fact that the Qur’an accepts the New Testament Gospels as the *Injil* (the “fourfold Gospel”), the textually-affirming approach in which the entire text of the Gospel of John’s Prologue (chapter 1:1-18) and Book of Signs (chapters 1:19-12:50) is authenticated and understood as the highly mystical aspect of a rigidly monotheistic teaching whose trajectory intersects Sunni Islam’s normative theo-mystical teachings, is more compelling than the historical critical approach for Muslim academics, both Eastern and Western. However if Muslim biblicists insist on making historical analysis their starting point, they must be

¹¹²⁹ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, xxi-xxx.

¹¹³⁰ Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 280.

willing to: 1) engage in robust historical and textual analysis of the Qur'an and *ahadith* in order to better inform themselves as to the significance of multiple or variant readings as well as the diverse nature of Revelation; 2) consider the opinions of *diverse* historical scholars, whether they are Duhemian, Troeltschian, confessional, etc.; 3) consider what would be the faith ramifications of a Johannine historical analysis that rejects the Prologue, the "I am statements," and healing/raising miracles, while these (I contend) are affirmed in the Qur'an, and rather presents a Jesus devoid of his prophethood and Christhood. In my mind, the fact that contemporary SMBs have not done these things substantively equates their research to a simply more sophisticated form of polemicism rather than what I am calling *polemirenicism*. As far as I know, there has not been a *true polemirenic* Muslim biblicist in hundreds of years, and I doubt very seriously that if a modern confessional Muslim were to engage the Gospel of John through a true *polemirenic* textually-critical approach, he would agree with the likes of Azami and Dirks. He would, I would wager, come to accept John as the *Injil* of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Eight: Analysis & Conclusion

My contention that the Qur'an attempts to restore the proto-Johannine or Jamsonian teaching of the Gospel while repudiating its post-apostolic Trinitarian interpretive tradition, can be demonstrated when we catalog the Qur'an's allusions and intertextual references to the Gospel of John, as well as its criticisms of Trinitarian theology. When the Qur'an speaks of the *Injil*, it is speaking perhaps *primarily* of the Gospel of John, and reading the Gospel of John through a "*polemirenic*" Sunnite confessional lens, that is, both rigorously academic in the Christian tradition as well as situated firmly within Sunnite mystical traditions (Sufism), it reveals that the Johannine Jesus (*'Isa*) was a beloved and sanctified agent of God, annihilated in God's very character, who taught the world profound and transcendental spiritual verities that were actualized and taught by the great Sufi Masters a few centuries later. The Gospel of John represents the essence of the spiritual message of Jesus Christ, the Messenger of God, but in order for the Muslim reader to understand that message, he or she must be well versed in Islam's spiritual itinerary concerning mystical union, annihilation in God's love and character, as well as the importance of a "divinized" agent of God acting as moral exemplar upon the earth. It is only then that the highly mystical and in some cases, *seemingly* blasphemous, Johannine statements attributed to Christ may be reconciled with Islam's spiritual teachings.

My contention is that Jesus Christ was just such a “divinity” (θεός [John 1:18.5]); a sanctified yet fully human reflection of “the Father” who provides his people intimate knowledge (*ma’rifah*) and loving relationship with God by adherence to his *tariqah* (ὁδός). Thus the teachings of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Fourth Gospel, are in agreement with the teachings of the Qur’an and Muhammad, as espoused by the great spiritual Masters of Sunnite Islam. According to the textually-affirming approach, the theological differences between Islam and Christianity, at least in their orthodox understandings, is due to post-biblical/apostolic proto-orthodox exegeses of the Gospel of John, a thoroughly Semitic text, by Patristic authorities who interpreted the text through non-Judaic (Hellenistic) lenses which ultimately resulted in corruption (*tahrif*) from a Muslim perspective of the message of Christ *as taught by the churches*, not as presented in the four Gospels (although there were attempts by the proto-orthodox to corrupt the latter). The following list contains correspondences between the Qur’an (Level III Revelation), and in most cases, the Gospel of John *only*, i.e. not the Synoptics, although there are certainly correspondences between the Qur’an and Synoptics as well (such as the nativity narratives, parable of the mustard seed, healing of the lepers, keeping the Law, etc.).

Jesus makes unique Johannine-style “I am statement” in Q 19:30.

In Q 19:30 Jesus says: “Indeed *I am* [emphatic] the servant of God” (إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ). The “servant of the Lord” (עֶבֶד יְהוָה) appears to be a unique title of the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible (Isa. 52-53 in particular), and one that the Jews of Jesus’ day would have understood the significance of. In this series of Qur’anic *suwar* (17-19), while Muhammad, Noah, Zakariyya, Khidr, even the Babylonians, are all called ‘*abd* (عبد) or

'ebad (عباد) by God, only Jesus says it in the first person thus echoing, even *confirming*, the Johannine “I am statements.” This *ayah* demonstrates Jesus’ unique *'ubudiyya*/relationship to the *Rabb* as he is the Messiah (*the 'Abd* whom the Israelites were awaiting), as well as his rank as God’s wisdom personified. But could this actually be a corrective/polemic *against* John? In my opinion, it is not. It is rather a repudiation of the exegetical tradition of Trinitarian Christianity which has interpreted the Johannine statements as being claims of deity. In other words, the Qur’an is highlighting what the Johannine “I am statements” *really* mean for its Christian listeners. Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not contain such statements. The next part of the *ayah* has Jesus say, “He (God) has given me the Book...” which al-Zamakhshari asserts is the *Injil*.¹¹³¹ Thus Jesus was made a prophet since birth and was taught the *Injil* by God directly until his Messengership (رسالة) at age thirty.

Jesus is called the “Word of God” in Q 3:45, 64; 19:35.

It is noteworthy that *no other Gospel* refers to Jesus as “the Word;” it is an intertextuality that exists between the Qur’an and the Gospel of John *only*. In Q 3:64, after a long section about Jesus (Q 3:42-63), the Qur’an says: “O People of the Bible! Let us come to *a common word* (كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ) between us and you - that we worship none but God...” While *all* of the commentators I have seen interpret “common word” here to be a common teaching or an agreed-upon doctrine of sorts,¹¹³² which I agree with, it would not be out of the question to suggest that “word” here is actually a reference to Jesus, as he is called by this title at the beginning of the section (v. 45), and thus the section has come full circle. Therefore “a common word” is a “common Christology,” a teaching

¹¹³¹ *al-Kashshaf*, Q 19:30.

¹¹³² Cf. al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, Q 3:64; al-Maturidi, *al-Ta’wilat*, Q 3:64.

about Jesus Christ. In Q 19:35 we read: “That is Jesus the son of Mary; (I speak) the statement of truth about which they are disputing” (with “the statement of truth” [قول الحق] as a direct object in the accusative suggesting that the verb “I speak” is understood (مفهوم) but apocopated (محذوف) according to al-Qurtubi.¹¹³³ In other words, the aforementioned descriptions about Jesus are true statements that the Prophet Muhammad has uttered. However al-Qurtubi also notes that “the statement of truth” may also be read in the nominative.¹¹³⁴ If this is the case, then “the statement of truth” or rather “the word of the Truth (God)” is a nominal substitute for Jesus - Jesus is the Logos of God about which they (Christian denominations) are in dispute concerning.¹¹³⁵ Christ is the economical manifestation of an exalted pre-eternal and impersonal Decree (أمر) of God who speaks the words (كلمات) of God and is thus the created *expressed speech* (كلام لفظي), just as the expressions (لفظ) of the Qur’an are the economical manifestations of Divine Pre-Eternal Speech (كلام نفسي وقديم).¹¹³⁶

John the Baptist witnesses concerning the Logos/Kalimah

The Qur’an (3:39.5) says about John the Baptist: ... “witnessing concerning a unique word from God” (مُصَدِّقًا بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ). In John’s Prologue (1:7.5) we read: “This (John) came to bear witness concerning the light” (ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός), and

¹¹³³ al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami*,’ Q 19:35.

¹¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹³⁵ See the *Panarion* (“The Medicine Chest”) of heresiologist and post-Nicene orthodox Bishop of Salamis Ephiphanius (d. 403) where he details the beliefs of eighty “heterodox” Christian sectarians; cf. St. Ephiphanius, *The Panarion of Ephiphanius of Salamis: Book I Sects 1-46*, Frank Williams, ed., (Leiden: Brill, 1987), St. Ephiphanius, *The Panarion of Ephiphanius of Salamis: Book II Sects 47-80, De Fide*, Frank Williams, ed., (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

¹¹³⁶ The Mu’tazilite charge that the Sunnites made the Qur’an into exactly what the Christians made Christ, an “inbibliation” as opposed to the incarnation of the latter, is not valid. As mentioned earlier, Sunnite authorities do not maintain that the *Kalam Nafsi wa’l Qadim* is a separate and distinct hypostatic entity who is fully deity, but rather an attribute of God that is “not the Essence nor anything other than it,” according to al-Maturidi. See: Nader El-Bizri, “God: Essence and Attributes,” in *Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter, ed., 1212-140; Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, *Sharh al-fiqh al-akbar* (Hyderabad, 1948).

of course “the light” can be understood as synonymous for the word.¹¹³⁷ The intertextual correspondence is more than obvious. No other Gospel says anything remotely resembling this statement from the Fourth Gospel.

The Disciples are “Witnesses”

The Qur’an (3:53) says, quoting the Disciples of Jesus: “Our Father (*Rabbana*)!¹¹³⁸ We have believed in what you have revealed and we have obeyed your Sent One, so ordain for us to be among the *witnesses*” (رَبَّنَا ءَامَنَّا بِمَا أُنزِلَتْ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ) (فَأَكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ). In John 15:27 Jesus says to his Disciples: “And you also will bear witness, because you are with me from (the) beginning” (καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ μαρτυρεῖτε ὅτι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐστε). Ibn ‘Ajibah says that “witness” in the discourse of the Sufis means, “what is most present in a person’s heart or dominates his remembrance, such that it becomes like something he sees even if it is not physically present... “You are ‘by the witness’ of whatever is present (حاضر) in your heart.”¹¹³⁹ The Disciples will tell the world about Christ as he will be present and *alive in their hearts*.¹¹⁴⁰ Both statements could also contain an interesting second meaning and thus veiled prophecy if we analyze them from a linguistic standpoint; the Greek word for a martyr (μάρτυς) is related etymologically to the verb μαρτυρεῖτε stated by Christ in the above verse; John the Baptist “bears witness” because he will give his life while exhorting all to follow the word of God. Hence he is called Yahya (يحيى), meaning “living,” because the Qur’an says: “And do not say of those

¹¹³⁷ Several classical exegetes take “*kalimah min Allah*” as a reference to Christ (Cf. al-Razi, *Mafatih*, Q 3:35; al-Tabari, *Jami’ al-Bayan*, Q 3:35; al-Maturidi, *al-Ta’wilat*, Q 3:35).

¹¹³⁸ As stated earlier, in the religious milieu of Jesus and his Disciples, the term “Father” (*Abb*) denoted God’s immanence (معية) and thus carries with it a very personal appeal in supplicatory utterances (أدعية). My contention is that the *Abb* of the *Injil* is the *Rabb* of the Qur’an, hence my translation of “*Rabbana*” in Q 3:53.1 as “Our Father” in the supplication of the Disciples.

¹¹³⁹ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism (Miraj al-tashawwuf ila haqa’iq al-tasawwuf)*, translated by Aresmouk and Fitzgerald, 67.

¹¹⁴⁰ The Sufis often chant about Muhammad: “(He is) alive in our hearts!” (حي في قلوبنا).

who are killed in the path of God, ‘(They are) dead!’ No! (They are) alive! But you do not perceive.” In Arabic, we also find this linguistic nuance. The Disciples pray to be among the *shahidin* الشَّاهِدِينَ; etymologically related to the word *shahid* (شهيد), meaning *martyr*. Perhaps Christ is foretelling the martyrdoms of the Disciples for his sake as he certainly did in John 16:2 and John 21:18-19, the latter specifically with respect to Peter.¹¹⁴¹

Jesus Christ is the “living waters” which cleanses and heals

In *Surah Maryam* (Q 19:24.9), when Mary gives birth under a palm tree she is told by someone (possibly the infant Jesus): “Indeed your Lord has made a spring under you” (فَدَّ جَعَلَ رَبُّكَ تَحْتِكَ سَرِيًّا); the “Lord” is the Father and the “spring” which the Father “made under” her represents Christ himself - *he* is the spring!¹¹⁴² The verb *ja-’a-la* (جعل) usually denotes a change of state; the Word (Logos) has been made flesh. She is then commanded to drink and “cool her eye” with the spring water. Through her *contact* with the “living waters,” she is healed and finds comfort, just like the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, or the man born blind in John 9 who comes into contact with the living waters of *Siloam* (the Sent One). In John, Jesus actually likens himself to a new-born child who comforts his mother after her painful delivery when he says: “Whenever a woman goes into labor she has sorrow because her time came, but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers her anguish, because of the joy that a human being

¹¹⁴¹ According to Chadwick, it wasn’t until the third-century CE when many apocryphal romances began to appear documenting the lives and deaths of various disciples of Jesus. Legends of this sorts are related in the Acts of Thomas, Acts of Paul, Acts of Peter, and the Acts of John. See: Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 17.

¹¹⁴² *The Study Qur’an* (p. 770, Q 19:24) mentions that some exegetes took *sariyyan* (سريا) rather as an adjective meaning “noble” or “distinguished,” thus describing Christ (Cf. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-’Azim*; al-Qushayri, *Lata’if*; al-Tabrisi, *Majma’*; al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*). The multiple-layered aspect of Revelation allows both meanings to work: Christ is the spring *and* he is noble, distinguished.

has been born into the world. Therefore, you also now have sorrow, but again *I will see you*, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:21-22). Likewise, he says according to the Qur’an (19:32): “(God) made me pious toward my mother and not arrogant nor overbearing” (وَبَرًّا بِوَالِدَتِي وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْنِي جَبَّارًا شَقِيًّا). Finally, while the evangelist tells us that “water and blood” flowed at Jesus’ death (John 19:34), they also flowed, according to the Qur’an, at his birth.

Jesus is the “Bread of Life” who came down from heaven

In addition to the spring underneath near, Mary is given fresh ripe dates from above which fall upon her. These dates symbolize Jesus, the “bread (food) having come down from heaven” mentioned in the difficult “Eucharistic” passage of John 6. In the Bible’s Wisdom literature, wisdom (*hokma*) itself is personified and says: “Come eat of my bread and drink the wine which I have mingled” (Proverbs 9:5-6); “Those who eat of me will hunger still; those who drink of me will thirst for more” (Sirach 24:21). In the former verse, the word for “bread” is *lehem* (لَحْم), and the Gospel as well as the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad¹¹⁴³ agree that Jesus was born in “the House of Bread” (Bethlehem). Mary is then told to “Eat!” (كُلِي), which some exegetes take as a spiritual type of nourishment.¹¹⁴⁴ Jesus is the very wisdom of God personified - “And He (God) will teach Jesus Revelation and Wisdom (حكمة) ...” (Q 3:48.1). The latter is taken by many Sufi exegetes to represent *Ihsan/tasawwuf/Irfan*, spiritual excellence, or rather the spiritual path leading to God, the *Via Christi*. Therefore “eating bread,” or rather eating

¹¹⁴³ *Hadith* no. thirty-nine in al-Nabahani’s *Virtues of the Prophet and His Nation* (فضائل النبي وأمة) mentions Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus. This *hadith* originates with al-Nasa’i. Bethlehem was one of the stops of the Prophet where he dismounted *al-buraq* and prayed two cycles en route to Jerusalem during the Night Journey and Ascension (صليت ببيت لحم حسث ولد عيسى عليه السلام).

¹¹⁴⁴ al-Baydawi, *Anwar*, Q 19:25; Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-’Azim*, Q 19:25.

Jesus' "flesh," means to dedicate oneself completely to his *way of wisdom* while "drinking his blood" means to embrace his life, since blood is the life force of a person or animal. According to Coloe, this is a great *zikkar*, remembrance (ذكر) of Jesus.¹¹⁴⁵

Jesus miraculously knew the amount of food that people possessed

The only miracle in all four gospels is the Johannine fourth sign: the feeding of five thousand. However, only the Johannine evangelist tells us: "When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a great crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread so that these (people) might eat?' But this he said testing him, for he already *knew* what he was about to do. Philip answered him, 'Two-hundred silver coins' worth of bread is not enough for each (person) to receive a little'" (John 6:5-7)! The Qur'an quotes Jesus saying (Q 3:49.5): "And I *inform* you with respect to what you eat and what you store up in your houses" (وَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ).

Qur'an calls the Gospel "Injil," a Greek word transliterated

The Gospel of Jesus is written in Greek; this is why the Qur'an calls it by a Greek word. That is all. While Jesus most certainly also taught the Gospel in his native Syriac (and Hebrew), God in His infinite wisdom, inspired his early followers to write in Greek as this was the *lingua franca* of the ancient Near East surrounding the Mediterranean. One may object and cite the *ayah*: "We never sent an Apostle except that (he spoke) in the language of *his people* (قَوْمِهِ), so that he might make it (the Revelation) clear for them" (Q 14:4.1). My response is threefold: 1) Jesus is technically not from the "people" (قوم) of the "Children of Israel" because his father is not from them (he has no earthly father). Thus this verse does not apply to him; 2) Even if we concede that the Children of

¹¹⁴⁵ Mary L. Coloe, P.B.V.M., *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 2001), 65-84.

Israel are in fact “his people,” the majority of them lived in Diaspora and spoke *Greek*; 3) Jesus was “helped by the Holy Spirit” in the sense that his Disciples were extensions of him, a “realized eschatology” of sorts to use Dodd’s phrase;¹¹⁴⁶ they did his works, wrote his message under inspiration, and carried it to Jews (and Gentiles) in the Greek provinces.

Qur’an uses the Johannine “language of Sent”

The Gospel of John is the most explicit of the canonical Gospels in its usage of “Sent language” (“around fifty times”)¹¹⁴⁷ with reference to Jesus Christ; see: 3:17, 34; 5:36; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 9:7; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 21, 23; 20:21. Jesus is called “the Sent One” in the Qur’an consistently as well: “O Children of Israel! I am the Sent One (رسول: passive noun) of God unto you...” (Q 61.1).

Jesus confirms the Law of Moses

The Qur’an tells us that Jesus said: “O Children of Israel!... (I have come) to confirm the Law which is before me.” In John: Moses wrote of Jesus (John 1:45; 5:46); Jesus upbraids the Jewish authorities for not keeping the Law (John 7:19); Jesus appeals to the Torah to justify his claims and teachings (John 8:17; 10:34). Of course, this aspect of Jesus’ teaching is also found in Matthew, esp. 5:16-20.

Jesus prophesied the coming of the Paraclete

The Qur’an says: “And remember when Jesus, the son of Mary, said: ‘O Children of Israel! I am the Sent One of God to you; I confirm the Torah that is before me, and I give glad tidings of (another) Sent One to come after me whose title shall be ‘the most

¹¹⁴⁶ See: C.H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel*, 1938.

¹¹⁴⁷ Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Bauckham and Mosser, 265.

illustrious' (Ahmad [أحمد])" (Q 61:6). When Muslim polemicists/biblicists¹¹⁴⁸ or classical exegetes¹¹⁴⁹ look to the Christian writings to confirm this *ayah* (61:6), they *never* look further than the Johannine Paraclete (ὁ παράκλητος) passages (John 14-16). The Pshitta, unfortunately, does not provide us with an Aramaic/Syriac translation of the original Greek παράκλητος, but rather *transliterates* the Greek as "*Paraqlata*." Equally unfortunate is that Al-Tayyib also rendered the Syriac term, whatever it was, into the transliterated "*al-Fariqlit*" (الفارقليط).¹¹⁵⁰ However John Joseph identifies the Aramaic of Paraclete as *Mnahmana*, meaning "compassionate," and *Mrahmana* (modern Aramaic; related to the Arabic *rahman*).¹¹⁵¹ The word *Mnahmana* appears to be an intensified participle due to the *mem*-prefix and *nun*-suffix, while the triliteral root is *na-ha-ma*.¹¹⁵² According to the BDB, Syriac does not contain the triliteral root *ha-ma-da*, from which Ahmad is derived.¹¹⁵³ If it had, then the Piel (*fa'ala*) participle would have been something close to *Mahmada* or *Mhamdana*, which almost sounds like a morph of Muhammad and Ahmad. Payne-Smith gives the Syriac *mnahmana* (sp. מנהמנא in Hebrew; Arab. منحمنى) as a derivative of the root *na-ha-ma*, meaning "to raise to life."¹¹⁵⁴ Perhaps the difference between *Mnahmana* and *Mhamdana* is due to what Moloney and Kelly call

¹¹⁴⁸ Cf. Ahmad Deedat, *Muhammad: The Natural Successor to Christ* who quoted 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali (*The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Q 61:6) who contended that "Paraclete" (*Paraklaytos*) is a mutilation of "*Periklytos*," meaning essentially "Ahmad," the most praised (according to 'Ali). Bucaille makes this claim as well (*The Bible, Qur'an and Modern Science*). Being that there is no external evidence of this, it is an argument thoroughly *ex silentio*.

¹¹⁴⁹ al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, Q 61:6; al-Razi, *Mafatih*, Q 61:6.

¹¹⁵⁰ Al-Tayyib, *Diaress*. Ch. 46, J 14:26, 16:7.

¹¹⁵¹ John Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, & Colonial Powers* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹¹⁵² The equivalent in Hebrew appears to be "*Menahem*;" cf. W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 200. See: Gesenius: (*na-ha-ma*) in the Piel means "to comfort" (544); cf. 2Ki. 15:14, 16-17, 19, 20-23 for Menahem.

¹¹⁵³ BDB, 326. This root is found in Aramaic, however.

¹¹⁵⁴ Robert Payne-Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 335.

“popular etymology.”¹¹⁵⁵ This is how Moloney explains the difference between the words *Shiluakh* and *Siloam* in his commentary of John 9; Jesus told the blind man to wash in the pool of *Siloam* (Σιλωάμ), “which means ‘Sent’” (ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται ἀπεσταλμένος [John 9:7.5]); the Hebrew *Shiluakh* (root: *shin-lamed-chet*) became the Syriac *Siloam* (*sin-lamed-mem*) and these words only have one root letter in common: the penultimate radical *lamed*. Another example could be the Hebrew *Bacca* to the Arabic *Mecca*. The point is, the lack of the *chamad* (*ha-ma-da*) Hebrew root in Syriac may be due to the fact that it fell out of use, or was subsumed by the similar sounding *nacham* (*na-ha-ma*), in which case, *Mnahmana* and *Mhamdana* would be equivalent in meaning, or to put it in Johannine terms, *Mnahmana*, ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται *Mhamdana*. It is clear, however, that ὁ παράκλητος is meant as a *title* rather than as a proper name, thus the Syriac *Mnahmana* as an equivalent to Ahmad is actually more appropriate than *Mhamdana*, since the former is in fact an adjectival title of the Prophet Muhammad meaning “the most praised, illustrious, lauded,” just as “the Christ” is a title of Jesus. Interestingly, the Qur’an calls both Jesus and Muhammad “*rahmah*” (رحمة), a designation closely related to the modern Aramaic for Paraclete *Mrahmana*, thus possibly explaining the Johannine phrase “another Paraclete” (John 14:16). *Mnahmana*, *Mrahmana*, and Ahmad all share two root letters (*chet* [*ha*] and *mem* [*mim*]) which is indicative of their possibly common archaic origin.

F.C. Burkitt suggests that due to his contacts with monks at St. Catherine’s monastery, Muslim historiographer Ibn Hisham may have had access to a Syriac

¹¹⁵⁵ Anthony J. Kelly C.S.S.R, and Francis J. Maloney, S.D.B., *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 206.

manuscript of John's Gospel (Diatessaron?) from which he translated the following from John 15:23-27:

(23) He who hates me hated the Lord (*Arrab*). (24) and if I had not done in their presence works none before me did, they would not have had sin. But from now they were getting the better of me and of my Lord. (25) But the word which is written in the Law (*Annamus*) must be fulfilled: "They hated me gratuitously." (26) So if *Almunhamanna* had come, him whom Allah will send you from the Lord (and) Spirit of Justice (truth) (*qist*) or Holiness (*quds*): he is that which comes forth from the Lord - he would be a witness to me: (27) and you too because of old you were with me. I have told you about this that you might not be made to stumble.¹¹⁵⁶

The Paraclete seems to evolve anthropomorphically from a *purely* spiritual and immortal indwelling entity, "the Holy Spirit," in John 14, to a more human messenger who "speaks" only what he "hears" and teaches spiritual truths, "the Spirit of Truth," in John 16. *Both* are true, as this is yet another example of the Johannine Gospel's multi-layered aspect. I believe that the Paraclete is *the holy spirit of prophecy* that inspires men to preserve (and restore) the message of Christ. Christ himself is called a "paraclete" (παράκλητος) in 1 John 2:1 because he is a guided and sanctified prophet who speaks *through* the Spirit and acts as mediator between God and man. 1 John 4:1 makes it clear that the spirits of prophets must be "tested" in order to determine whether they can be true speakers of the Paraclete (as opposed to speakers of the spirit of the anti-Christ): "Beloved, do not believe in every spirit, but test the *spirits* (πνεύματα) to determine if

¹¹⁵⁶ From Wustenfield's edition of Ibn Hisham, p. 150 (verse numbers were added by me). See: A Guthrie and E.F.F. Bishop, "The Muslim Paraclete, Almunhamanna, and Ahmad," *The Muslim World*, 41 (1951), 251-256; William Montgomery Watt, "His Name is Ahmad," *ibid.*, 43 (1953), 110-117. Immediately we notice that Ibn Hisham translated "my Father" (τὸν πατέρα μου) as "the Lord" (الرب); interpreting the Johannine "Father-Son language" as denoting divine immanence and relationship, just as his Ghazali would nearly three hundred years later. In v. 26, Ibn Hisham seems to have taken some liberties in this translation due to the theological implications of Jesus saying "whom I will send to you from the Father" (ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς) thus translating this statement as (the slightly incoherent), "whom Allah will send to you from the Lord." Although it is possible that this is actually how the statement appeared in the manuscript if Burkitt's assumption is correct.

they are from God, for many *false-prophets* (ψευδοπροφήται) have gone out into the world.” Thus in Johannine nomenclature, “true prophets” and “true spirits” are *interchangeable*; thus “the Spirit of Truth” can be described as “the Prophet of Truth.” After the widespread *interpretive* corruption of the Gospel (after “the loss” [منقذا بعد ((الضياع]],¹¹⁵⁷ the great restorer of the Gospel, Muhammad, spoke through the agency of the Paraclete and gave us the Qur’an, guidance “unto all truth” about Jesus Christ: “Say: The Holy Spirit revealed it (the Qur’anic message) from your Lord in order to solidify those who have believed, as a guidance and evangelon (Gospel) for the true submitters (قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ) (‘رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيُثَبِّتَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ’).¹¹⁵⁸ The synonymy of “spirit” and “prophet” in John is also found in the Qur’an which refers to the “Messenger after Jesus” as *the Ahmad (Mnahmana)*, because in addition to the interesting etymological correspondences between the Syriac *Mnahmana* and Ahmad/Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam is the “Spirit (Prophet) of Truth” *par excellence*, as he is the greatest restorer of the authentic message of Jesus Christ whose core message will remain uncorrupted until the end of time - “he will remain with you forever” (John 14:15). Christian critics of “the Paraclete as Ahmad,” often insist that the descriptions of the Paraclete are only of the Holy Spirit, not a human messenger. Even *The Study Qur’an* finds the idea of Ahmad being the Paraclete “complicated” by further descriptions of the latter in the Johannine text.¹¹⁵⁹ However this was not how the Johannine community *itself* understood the title of Paraclete, as demonstrated above. Additionally, this criticism is ignorant of the fact that according to Christian history, several charismatic Christian “prophets” and preachers,

¹¹⁵⁷ From the famous ode to the Prophet known as “The Full Moon Has Risen Over Us” (طلع البدر علينا).

¹¹⁵⁸ Q 16:102.

¹¹⁵⁹ *The Study Qur’an*, Q 61:6, p. 1366.

such as Montanus of Phrygia (d. circa late 2nd c. CE) and his female colleagues Prisca and Priscilla, claimed to be the Paraclete, or rather *inspired* by the Paraclete. Of course Catholic exegetes also confess to an apparent contradiction in the Paraclete passages, if they are to understand the Paraclete as the third person of the Trinity; the Holy Spirit was certainly with Christ during his ministry as well as with Zachariah and John the Baptist for that matter, yet Jesus clearly says that the Paraclete will come *after* his departure (“for if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you” [John 16:7.5]). If Catholic exegetes can resolve this apparent contradiction by appealing to the enigmatic language of “pre-eternal procession” and “economical sending,”¹¹⁶⁰ then my contention about the Paraclete as the holy spirit of prophecy finding its greatest manifestation in Muhammad, whose message restored Nazarene Jamsonian/” proto-Johannine” Christology and whose very title Ahmad is etymologically related to “the Paraclete,” is certainly not far-fetched.

Jesus is “helped” by the Holy Spirit (the Helper)

The Qur’an says: “And We *helped* him (Jesus) with the Holy Spirit”¹¹⁶¹ (Q 2:87.5, 2:253.5), while in John 14:25 we read: “But the *Helper*, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and remind you of all things which I have said to you.”¹¹⁶²

¹¹⁶⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations*, 38.8.

¹¹⁶¹ Imam al-Tabari considers the “Holy Spirit,” or rather “Spirit of Holiness” (روح القدس) to be the Gospel itself (*Jami’ al-Bayan*). This is not the archangel Gabriel as Ibn Kathir (*Tafsir al-’Azim*) surmises, but rather a spirit of holiness and revelation, the Paraclete, that inspired the Disciples to write the Gospel faithfully after the departure of Christ. The Gospels are thus extensions of Christ.

¹¹⁶² The ESV, NKJV, and NASB translate Paraclete as “Helper.”

God inspires the Disciples

The Qur'an says: "And remember when I inspired the Disciples (saying):
"Believe in Me and in the One whom I sent" (Q 5:111.1);¹¹⁶³ the author of the Gospel of John tells us: "This is the disciple who witnesses concerning these (events) and who wrote these things, and we know (well) that his witness is true" (John 21:24).

Jesus the Messiah not killed by men

The Qur'an says: "But they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it was made to appear so unto them" (Q 4:157.5). The Messiah was not murdered, he willingly sacrificed himself, then his soul was seized *by God* directly (cf. Q 3:55) - not by a human being. The death of the Messiah was according to the well-pleasing (preferential) will of God and Christ had submitted to that will. The evangelist says that Jesus said: "*No human being can take it (my soul) from me*, but I put it down willingly. I have permission to put it down and permission to receive it again. I received this order from my Father" (John 10:18).

Book of Glory Allusions: Last Supper, Betrayal of Judas, Jesus as witness (shahid) over Disciples

The Qur'an tells us that Jesus made the following prayer in the company of his Disciples presumably at the very end of his ministry: "Jesus, the son of Mary, said: 'O God, our Father (ربنا)! Send down a *supper* table from heaven which will be a *feast* for us, (for) the first of us and the last of us, and (to be) a *Sign* from You.' God said: 'Indeed I am sending it down upon you all, but the one (Judas?) who might disbelieve after (this)

¹¹⁶³ *The Study Qur'an* (p. 334) comments: "In this verse, God speaks in the first person to state that He inspired the apostles to believe, using a verb for 'inspired' that is related to *wahy*, which usually denotes prophetic revelation. In this context, it is glossed as a "casting into the heart," indicating a less direct or verbatim form of inspiration than what the prophet received (IK, T)," with "IK" and "T" being references to Ibn Kathir and al-Tabari. I have contended in this dissertation that what the Disciples received from God was a type III Revelation (*iha'a* or *ilham*).

among you (all), I will punish him with a punishment the likes of which I have not punished any creature” (Q 5:114-115). A couple of *ayat* later, the Qur’an tells us that Jesus will say to God on the Day of Judgment: “I was a witness (شَهِيداً) over them while I was with them; but when You seized my soul (توفيتني), You were the Watcher over them, and You are a witness (شَهِيد) over *all things*” (Q 5:117.5-.9). The evangelist tells us: “Before the festival of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his time had come and he would leave from this world to the Father (John 13:1.1) ... So while it was supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, that he should betray him (John 13:2) ... ‘While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your Name which You have given to me, and I guarded (them), and no one from them was lost, except ‘the son of destruction’ (Judas Iscariot), so that the Scripture might be fulfilled’” (John 17:12). Two things to notice: 1) The Johannine language of the Qur’anic passage (Father, supper, heaven, feast, Sign, sending/going down, witness); 2) Christ and God are both called “witness.” This juxtaposition demonstrates Jesus’ exalted status as God’s uniquely purified agent (“Son”) upon the earth who, as an extension of God, does the “works of God” (cf. Q 9:62); God witnesses *all things* and Jesus, “in a similar way” (ὁμοίως) witnesses (cf. John 5:19). In this Qur’anic passage, the object of the witness are the people/followers/Disciples of Christ. Thus we have an echo of John 10:22-30 in which Christ intimates that he and his Father are watching over the Disciples, no one can “snatch them” out of their hands - “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Jesus the Nazarene

The Qur'an consistently refers to Christians as *Nasara* (Nazarenes; Arab. نصارى) e.g., Q 2:62, 111, 113, 120, 135, 140; 3:67; 5:14, 18, 51, 69, 82; 9:30; 22:17.¹¹⁶⁴ The Gospel of John is the only Gospel, with the exception of a solitary passage in Matthew 2:23, to refer to Jesus as "Jesus the Nazarene" (Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος) e.g., John 18:5, 7; 19:19.

The "Signs" and "Spirit"!

The Qur'an refers to Jesus or his miracles (works) as "signs" *seven* times (Q 3:48 [2], 49; 19:21; 21:91; 23:50; 43:61); Mary is called "sign" twice (Q 23:50; 21:91). Of course the "Book of Signs" contains *seven* signs, with seven representing divine perfection, or is simply a Semitic euphemism for "many" or "several."¹¹⁶⁵ Given the fact that the Book of Signs contains seven signs and that the Book of Glory contains the Paraclete, or Holy Spirit passages, could the following Qur'anic statement be a veiled reference to the Gospel of John?: "And we gave Jesus, the son of Mary clear Signs (*Bayyināt*) And We helped him with the Holy Spirit (*Ruh'il Qudus*)" (Q 2:87.5, 2:253.5) - Signs and Spirit? Books of Signs and Glory?

Jesus raises the dead "by God's leave"

The Qur'an says that Jesus said: "And I raise the dead, by God's leave/permission (بإذن الله)" (Q 3:49.5). In John 11:41.5-42, Jesus prays at the grave of Lazarus saying: "Father, I am grateful to You because You have heard me. And I have known (well) that You always hear me, but for the sake of the crowd standing around I said (it out loud), so that they might believe that You sent me." To "hear" prayer is an Aramaism which means to grant or accept as worthy. Ironically, the resurrection miracle pericopes recorded in the

¹¹⁶⁴ See: *The Study Qur'an* for an explanation (p. 31, Q 2:62).

¹¹⁶⁵ In fact, the word "several" is related etymologically to "seven."

Synoptics are lacking such a clear admission on the part of Jesus of his utter dependence upon God's acceptance of his prayers.

The life-giving breath of Jesus

The Qur'an says that Jesus said: "And I breathe upon them (فأنفخ فيه), and they become (live) birds, by God's leave/permission" (Q 3:49.5). In John 20:21-22, after Jesus greets his Disciples with the familiar words of "*Shalom alaykhem*" (Εἰρηνὴ ὑμῖν), he "breathed on them" (εὐφύσησεν) and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Thus the "Christ-breath," as the Sufis call it, is not only able to bring things into physical life, by God's leave, but is also the means by which one may be sanctified in God through a spirit of holiness and thus receive *eternal* life.

Jesus heals the one "born" blind

The Qur'an says that Jesus said: "And I heal the one born blind (الأكمه), by God's leave/permission" (Q 3:49.5). The only other text that mentions Jesus healing a man who was *born blind* (τυφλὸς γεννηθῆν) is the Gospel of John, chapter 9, and not even the Synoptics. After the miracle, the healed man commented according to John 9:32: "Never was it heard that someone opened the eyes of a person born blind." This is true; this miracle has no precedent among the previous Israelite prophets.

Calumny against Mary

With respect to the slander of Mary, it is my contention that the Qur'an not only condemns the Jewish authorities and Rabbis of Late Antiquity residing in the *Hijaz* at Muhammad's time, but also the Jewish authorities of the *very generation* of Jesus himself, i.e. the ones who originated the slander, "the (children) of the *slanderer*"¹¹⁶⁶

¹¹⁶⁶ Διάβολος is also defined as "the slanderer" (BDAG, 182).

(John 8:44). The Qur'an (4:156.9) says that they uttered against Mary "a grave calumny" (بهتانا عظيما), which Muslim exegetes unanimously interpret to mean the charge of fornication.¹¹⁶⁷ Only John records the authorities say to Jesus: "At least *we* were not begotten from illicit sex" (John 8:41.5).

A Ta'wil revealing the Christic Ahl al-Bayt and (proto-)Johannine thematic elements?

Surah Maryam (chapter 19) in the Qur'an contains the names of all members of Christ's initial *Hagioikos* (أهل البيت) listed in the pivotal passage of John 19:23-27 (*also* chapter 19): Jesus/'Isa (عيسى), Q 19:34; Mary/*Maryam* (مريم): the names of Jesus' mother, aunt, and wife, Q 19:16; James/*Ya'qub* (يعقوب): whom I contend is the Beloved Disciple, Q 19:6; even James' student(?) and traditional namesake of the Gospel: John/*Yahya/Hanana* (يحيى) or (حنان), Q 19:7, 14. At the birth scene, we encounter "food from above" and a "spring from below," (Q 19:24-25); after the nativity narrative, the Qur'an records Jesus making his famous Qur'anic "I am statement" (Q 19:30), describing himself as the 'Abd Allah, the Perfect Man (الإنسان الكامل) who reflects all of the Names and Qualities (الأسماء والصفات) of the *Rabb* (*Abb*) and enjoys a unique (one-of-a-kind) unitive state with Him (عبد = υιος). Christ is then referred to as "the word of Truth" (if we take the nominative reading [Qurtubi])¹¹⁶⁸ [Q 19:34] (قول الحق), the Johannine Logos.

A Ta'wil revealing the Johannine chronology?

Surah Maryam begins with the enigmatic "disjointed letters" (الأحرف المتقطعة): *kaf ha ya ayn sad* (كهيعص). While Sunni authorities consistently maintain that the finest realities (حقائق) of these letters are unknown to anyone save God,¹¹⁶⁹ mystical exegetes

¹¹⁶⁷ al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, Q 4:157.

¹¹⁶⁸ *al-Jami*, Q 19:34.

¹¹⁶⁹ According to *The Study Qur'an*: "The individual letters are one of the most enigmatic features of the Quran and have been a subject of debate and speculation among Muslims since the revelation of the Quran."

have proposed their opinions from time to time,¹¹⁷⁰ with the caveat that none should be insistent or dogmatic about one's opinions. With that said, these letters are often interpreted to denote some sort of direct address (نداء) to the Prophet. For instance, Ibn 'Ajibah interprets the letters *ha mim* (حم) which begin *Surahs* 40-46 as denoting, "O My Beloved Muhammad!" (حبيبي محمد), while Ja'far al-Sadiq sees *ya sin* (يس) as saying, "O Master!" (يا سيدي). Shiite exegete Tabataba'i sees in *Kaf, Ha, Ya, 'Ayn, Sad* (Q 19:1) a prophecy of Imam Husayn's martyrdom: *Kaf*: Karbala, *Ha*: Hilal (crescent), *Ya* (Yazid), *'Ayn* ('*atashu-hu* [his thirst], *Sad* (*sidquhu* [his truthfulness])).¹¹⁷¹ However, given the premise that *Surah Maryam* functions as an unveiling of (proto-)Johannine thematic elements, perhaps the five disjointed letters reveal the following chronology: *Kaf* (*kalimah*: Logos) → *Ha* (*haykal*: temple, indwelling, tent) → *Ya* (*Yahya*: John [the Baptist]) → *'Ayn* (*'Isa*: Jesus) → *Sad* (*saleeb*: cross). The pre-eternal impersonal decree of God manifested and "tented" itself as flesh; the incarnated decree, now the person of Jesus of Nazareth, was confirmed by his predecessor John, and sacrificed his life to postpone his nation's immediate destruction at the hands of the Romans.

The Qur'an praises the Christians of Ephesus, the Johannine community

The story of the Companions of the Cave (أصحاب الكهف), known in Christian circles as "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus" is related in the Qur'an. The dominant opinion among New Testament scholars¹¹⁷² is that Ephesus is the very city where the

It is reported by many Quran commentators that Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, said, 'Every book has a mystery (*sirr*), and the mystery of the Quran is the beginning of the surahs,' 'Ali, the fourth Caliph, is reported to have said, 'Every book has a quintessence (*safwah*), and the quintessence of this Book is the spelled-out letters'" (p. 13, Q 2:1).

¹¹⁷⁰ Sahl al-Tustari mentions an opinion that the disjointed letters stand for various Names and Attributes of God (*Tafsir al-Tustari*, Q 2:1). Ibn 'Ajibah said: "Only the elite of the greatest Friends of God (*awliya*) know the secrets of these letters" (quoted from *The Study Qur'an*, p. 14, Q 2:1).

¹¹⁷¹ *al-Mizan*, Q 19:1.

¹¹⁷² R. Brown and Moloney, for instance.

Johannine community settled and flourished. In Q 18:9, God asks the Prophet Muhammad (and by extension his *ummah*): “Have you considered the People of the Cave and the Inscription (*al-Raqim*) as a marvel from among Our Signs?” While most Qur’anic exegetes maintain that *al-Raqim* is a tablet placed outside the mouth of the cave which tells the story of the youths,¹¹⁷³ al-Qurtubi suggests that it may have been a text or writing or some sort that contained the beliefs and commandments of the (Ephesian) Christian community.¹¹⁷⁴ If so, could it have been the Gospel of John? The Sleepers are described as “believers in their Lord,” those whom God “increased in guidance” (18:13), and possessing “fortified hearts” (18:14.1). However, they are quoted as saying: “These, *our people* (قومنا), have taken besides Him, deities!” (18:15.1-5). Thus the early Jamsonian (proto-Johannine) community eventually deviated from the pristine teachings of Christ by this time (around 250 CE) as proto-orthodox beliefs about Christ and the Holy Spirit had become popular in Ephesus. Although Muslim exegetes mention that the youths had sought refuge due to religious persecution and that upon awakening, a “righteous king” (probably Theodosius II) was now in power who accepted their beliefs and even confirmed his conviction concerning a somatic resurrection rather than merely a pneumatic one,¹¹⁷⁵ this all seems highly unlikely. There is nothing in the Qur’an’s narrative to suggest that the youths’ situation had now improved (by 450 CE: *postquam* the Councils of Nicea I [325 CE] & Constantinople I [381 CE] when Trinitarian *homoousion* Christianity is now the official state religion). If the Sleepers were in fact the final remnant of the original Jamsonian community, as I have contended, then they would

¹¹⁷³ al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, Q 18:9; al-Tabrisi, *Majma’ al-Bayan*, Q 18:9; al-Tabari, *Jami’ al-Bayan* Q 18:9.

¹¹⁷⁴ *al-Jami’*, Q 18:9.

¹¹⁷⁵ al-Tabari, *Jami’ al-Bayan*.

certainly have come into conflict with religious and political authorities. In fact, this is what the Sleepers' themselves have surmised. After they decide to go into the city (المدينة) to buy food (طعام), in *mimesis* of the Disciples in the Gospel of *John* ("for his disciples had gone into the city [πολις] to buy food [τροφή]" [4:8]), they said to each other: "Indeed, if they come to know of you, they will stone you or make you convert to their *Creed* (ملة)" (Cf. Q 18:19.5, 20.1-5).

The explicit "Johannine" language of the "Muhammadan I am statements"

These Muhammadan *dicta sacra* (Level II Revelation) revered by the Sufis reveal the Prophet's role as *via ad deum* as well as his station with his Lord. The phraseology of the Prophet Muhammad bears a striking resemblance to the phraseology of the Johannine Jesus. Even the Prophet's statement in which he intimates his close affinity to Jesus is an "I am statement:" "I am the closest of all people to Jesus" (أنا أولى الناس بعيسى).¹¹⁷⁶

HADITH No. 1. "Indeed, God decreed the fates of creation before he created the cosmos by 50,000 years while His throne was upon water. And one of the things written in the *Dhikr*, namely the Mother of the Book, was 'Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets.'"¹¹⁷⁷

إن الله عز وجل كتب مقادير الخلق قبل أن يخلق السموات والأرض بخمسين ألف سنة وكان عرشه على الماء. ومن جملة ما كتب في الذكر وهو أم الكتاب أن محمدا خاتم النبيين.

HADITH No. 2. Imam al-Baghawi in his *Sharh al-Sunnah* from 'Irbad b. Sariyah that the Apostle of God said: "Indeed (ἀμὴν ἀμὴν; ἰν) I was (lit. *I am* [ἐγὼ εἰμί, اني]) with God (πρὸς τὸν θεόν, عند الله), a decree (λόγος, مكتوب), (to be) the Seal of the Prophets while Adam was still kneaded in his clay (not yet brought to life [πρὶν Ἀδὰμ γενέσθαι])."¹¹⁷⁸

إني عند الله مكتوب خاتم النبيين وإن آدم لمنجدل في طينته

HADITH No. 3. "God revealed to Moses, the Prophet of the Children of Israel: 'Whoever meets me while rejecting (belief) in Ahmad (*Mnahmana*; παράκλητος), I will enter him into the Fire.' He (Moses) said: 'O *Rabb*! And who is Ahmad?' He (God) said:

¹¹⁷⁶ *Hadith* of Muslim.

¹¹⁷⁷ *Hadith* of Muslim. This *hadith* seems to contain a reference to Gen. 1 as well as the Johannine Prologue; "the Mother of the Book" is the Archetypal source of all Divine Revelation residing in the "Mind of God," His Sacred *Logoi* (decrees).

¹¹⁷⁸ *Sharh al-Sunnah* 3626; also see *Musnad Ahmad* no. 17150; *hadith* no. 3 in *Fada'il al-Nabi wa Ummatihi* by al-Nabahani (d. 1932 CE).

‘I have not created a creation more honored to Me. I wrote his name with My Name on the Throne before I created the cosmos.’”¹¹⁷⁹

أوحى الله إلى موسى نبي بني إسرائيل أنه من لقيني وهو جاحد بأحمد أدخلته النار. قال يا رب ومن أحمد؟ قال ما خلقت خلقا إكرم علي منه. كتبت اسمه مع اسمي في العرش قبل أن إخلق السموات والأرض.

HADITH No. 4. “He said: ‘O Jabir! Indeed, God the Sublime created before all things the light (φῶς); of your Prophet from His light... When God willed to create the creation, He divided that light into four parts.’”¹¹⁸⁰

يا جابر إن الله تعالى خلق قبل الأشياء نوره. فلما أراد الله أن يخلق الخلق قسم ذلك النور أربعة أجزاء.

HADITH No. 5. “Gabriel said to the Prophet: ‘Indeed (Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν) your *Rabb* says: ‘If I have taken Abraham as an intimate and beloved friend, then I have taken you as an even *more* intimate and beloved friend (*philiagapically* and uniquely [μονογενῆς] beloved; *al-Habib*). I did not create a creation more honored to Me than you. Indeed, I created the world only in order to acquaint them with your honor and rank with Me. If it were not for you, I would have not created the world.’”¹¹⁸¹

إن ربك يقول إن كنت قد اتخذت إبراهيم خليلا فقد اتخذتك حبيبا. وما خلقت خلقا أكرم علي منك. ولقد خلقت الدنيا وأهلها لأعرفهم كرامتك ومنزلتك عندي. ولو لآك خلقت الدنيا.

HADITH No. 6. “My *Rabb* (“Father” in Johannine language) taught me, and how excellent is my teaching.”¹¹⁸²

أدبني ربي فأحسن تأديبي.

HADITH No. 7. “Indeed (Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν) *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμί) only a gifted mercy.”¹¹⁸³
إنما أنا رحمة مهداة.

HADITH No. 8. “Indeed (Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν) I have many names/titles. *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμί) Muhammad. *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμί) Ahmad (*Mnahmana*; παράκλητος). *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμί) the Effacer through whom God effaces disbelief. *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμί) the Gatherer at whose feet

¹¹⁷⁹ *Hilyat al-Awliya wa Tabaqat al-Asiyya*, vol. 3 p. 375-376; considered fabricated by al-Dhahabi; hadith no. 12 in *Fada'il al-Nabi wa Ummatihi* by al-Nabahani (d. 1932 CE). The Prophet's appeal to antiquity is in effect: εἰ γὰρ ἐπιστεύετε Μωϋσῇ ἐπιστεύετε ἂν ἐμοὶ περὶ γὰρ ἐμοῦ ἐκεῖνος ἔγραψεν (John 5:46).

¹¹⁸⁰ *Hadith* of 'Abd al-Razzaq, although its authenticity is much disputed, as previously mentioned.

¹¹⁸¹ *Hadith* of Ibn 'Asakir. Compare this *hadith* to the iconic John 3:16.

¹¹⁸² *Hadith* of Ibn Sam'ani.

¹¹⁸³ *Hadith* of al-Hakim. According scholars of *hadith* (*muhaddithin*), this explains the nature of “*rahmah*” (رحمة) in the iconic Q 21:107, i.e. it is a gift (مهداة) from God. Jesus Christ is the only other prophet called *rahmah* in the Qur'an (Q 19:21.5), and the Gospel confirms that he also is a special gift from God: “If you only knew the gift (δωρεά) of Allah, and who is the one who is speaking to you (saying), ‘Give me to drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10.5-9); χάρις can also be translated as “gift” (BDAG, 877) as in John 1:16.9: “a gift in place of a gift” (χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος).

humanity will be gathered (on the Day of Judgement).¹¹⁸⁴ *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the Last (the *Omega*) the one after whom no prophet exists.”¹¹⁸⁵

إن لي أسماء أنا محمد وأنا أحمد وأنا الماحي الذي يمحو الله بي الكفر وأنا الحاشر الذي يحشر الناس على قدمي وأنا العاقب الذي ليس بعده نبي.

HADITH No. 9. Indeed (Ἀβραῆν ἀβραῆν) Abraham is the intimate friend of God, and it is so. Moses is the confidant of God, and it is so. Jesus is the Spirit of God, and it is so. Adam is the Chosen of God, and it is so. And indeed *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the Beloved of God, and it is no boast. *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the carrier of the banner of praise on the Day of Judgment under which will be Adam and all others, and it is no boast. *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the first one to intercede and the first whose intercession is accepted on the Day of Judgment, and it is no boast. *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the first one who will sound the ring of Paradise's door, and it will be opened for me, then I will enter into it, and with me will be the poor from the people of faith, and it is no boast.¹¹⁸⁶ *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the most ennobled (human being) from the first and last peoples, and it is no boast.¹¹⁸⁷

إن إبراهيم خليل الله وهو كذلك. وموسى نجي الله وهو كذلك. وعيسى روح الله وهو كذلك. وآدم اصطفاه الله وهو كذلك. ألا وأنا حبيب الله ولا فخر. وأنا حامل لواء الحمد يوم القيامة تحته آدم فمن دونه ولا فخر. وأنا أول شافع وأول مشفع يوم القيامة ولا فخر. وأنا أول من يحرك حلق الجنة فيفتح الله لي فيدخلنيها ومعني فقراء المؤمنين ولا فخر. وأنا أكرم الأولين والآخرين على الله ولا فخر.

HADITH No. 10. “*I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the leader of the Apostles (of God), and it is no boast. *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the Seal of the Prophets,¹¹⁸⁸ and it is no boast. *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the accepted Intercessor, and it is no boast.”¹¹⁸⁹
أنا قائد المرسلين ولا فخر وأنا خاتم النبيين ولا فخر وأنا أول شافع مشفع ولا فخر.

¹¹⁸⁴ Lings cites the coming of the *Shiloh* (the Gatherer) in Gen. 49:10 as being a Muhammadan prophecy: “The sceptre shall not pass from Judah nor the commandment from his seed (lit. between his legs), until the coming of Shiloh; then to *him*, shall the gathering of the nations be” (לֹא-יָסֹר שֵׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה וּמִחֻקֵּק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו עַד (קִי-יָבֹא שִׁילֹה וְלֹא יִקְהַת עַמִּים: Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based Upon the Earliest Sources*, 34).

¹¹⁸⁵ *Hadith* of Bukhari and Muslim.

¹¹⁸⁶ Compare to John 10:9: “*I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) the door (θύρα); if *through me* anyone should enter, (he) will be saved and will enter and leave and will find pasture.”

¹¹⁸⁷ *Hadith* of Tirmidhi.

¹¹⁸⁸ Cf. Q 33:40.1-5: “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets” (ما كان محمد أباً أحد من رجالكم ولكن رسول الله وخاتم النبيين).

¹¹⁸⁹ *Hadith* of Darimi and Tabarani.

سورة الإخلاص

(112:1) Say: “*Adonai* God is One and Only (2) God is the Origin of all. (3) He did not derive an equal, nor was He a derived equivalent (Lit. He did not beget, nor was He begotten). (4) And there is *nothing* (else) equal to Him.” (Q 112:1-4).
(١) قل هو الله أحد (٢) الله الصمد (٣) لم يلد ولم يولد (٤) ولم يكن له كفوا أحد

(v. 1) As stated earlier, the word Allah is the proper Name of God that shares an etymology with the Hebrew (in *pluralis majestatis*) *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים),¹¹⁹⁰ probably from the root *a-li-ha* (أله) meaning “to go to and fro in fear and perplexity”¹¹⁹¹ or from *aleph-waw-lamed* (اول), meaning “strength and power”¹¹⁹² and related to the Arabic Form II *awwala* (أول), “to interpret” or “find the origin of.” Ash’arite theologians offer the following brief definition of Allah: “A proper name denoting the Essence (which is) the Necessary Existent; the one deserving of all perfection and transcendent above all deficiencies” (علم على ذات الواجب الوجود، المستحق لجميع الكمالات المنتزه عن جميع النقائص). The Qur’an is confirming *in principle* that the God of Muhammad is the same God of the biblical prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. The word *Ahad* (أحد) is taken by Suyuti as either a permutative (بدل) or a second predicate (خبر ثان),¹¹⁹³ with *Huwa* as subject and the Exalted Expression (لفظ الجلالة), i.e. Allah, as first predicate. Tantawi says that the Exalted Expression as predicate indicates the occasion of the *surah*’s Revelation (سبب النزول) in which a group of Jews approached the Prophet asking about the identity of his God -

¹¹⁹⁰ BDB, Strong’s no. 410, p. 41.

¹¹⁹¹ Lane, 83. See note 1 of chapter 2 of this dissertation.

¹¹⁹² Gesenius, 20.

¹¹⁹³ *al-Jalalayn*, Q 112:1.

“Who is He (*Huwa*)?”¹¹⁹⁴ This is described in detail by al-Wahidi.¹¹⁹⁵ As discussed in chapter two, the pronoun *Huwa*, spelled *ha-waw* (هو) and meaning “He (is),” is close to the meaning of the enigmatic tetragrammaton (*Shem HaMeforash*) spelled *yod-he-waw-he* (יהוה), if we consider this to be the Qal imperfect tense of the verb *hawah* (הוה), meaning to “to be,”¹¹⁹⁶ thus “He is” (*yihweh*), and translated as $\acute{o} \acute{w}v$ (“[I am] He who is”) in the LXX (from the 1p sing. *Ehyeh* [Exo. 3:14]).¹¹⁹⁷ According to the Mishnah,¹¹⁹⁸ the *Shem HaMeforash* was only articulated in the Temple (*Bayt HaMiqdash*) by the High Priest (*HaCohen HaGadol*) and was believed to be the *most* exalted Name of God, the actual Name of His Essence in distinction to “Allah/Elohim” which *indicated* His Essence. Thus *Huwa*, or *Hahut* (هاهوت) according to Ibn al-’Arabi,¹¹⁹⁹ is believed to be *al-Ism al-’Azam* (الإسم الأعظم), the very Name of God’s Essence according to al-Razi.¹²⁰⁰ To put it in Philonic terms, Allah (الله)/Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) = *Ho Theos* (ο θεος) while *Huwa* (هو)/*Yihweh* (יהוה)¹²⁰¹ = *Ho On* (ὁ ὢν). The usage of *Ahad* as opposed to *Wahid* (واحد) is intended to confirm the fundamental creedal statement of the Children of Israel (بني اسرائيل), i.e. the *Shema* of Deut. 6:4: “Hear O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One

¹¹⁹⁴ Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, *Nur al-Yaqin: Mu’jam Wasit fi ‘Irab al-Qur’an al-Karim* (Maktab Lubnan Nashirun, 2003), 1192, Q 112:1.

¹¹⁹⁵ Cf. al-Wahidi, *Asbab al-nuzul*, Q 112:1.

¹¹⁹⁶ Gesenius (pg. 219) gives the Arabic cognate of הוה as either هَوَى meaning “to breathe” or هَوَى (*ha-wi-ya*) meaning “to desire, to love, to will.” The two prominent letters are the *ha* and *waw*. There are deep mystical meanings associated with all of this. God is the very “breath” of existence who willed to create as an act of cosmopolitan love.

¹¹⁹⁷ This is assuming that *Ha-wah* (הוה) is the archaic form of *Ha-yah* (היה), with the *waw* now having become a *yod*. The changing of weak letters for other weak letters is common in Semitic languages.

¹¹⁹⁸ *Sotah* VII. 6; *Tamid* VII. 2.

¹¹⁹⁹ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 270.

¹²⁰⁰ *Mafatih*, Q 112:1.

¹²⁰¹ The prominent letters of the Sacred Name are *ha* and *waw*, both of which are contained in the Arabic *Huwa* (هو) and *Hahut* (هاهوت) and the Hebrew tetragrammaton (יהוה), articulated as “*Adonai*” by the Jews. The latter is also abbreviated in the Tanakh as simply *Hu* (הו, with the *holem waw*), the exact letters of the Arabic *Huwa* (هو), “He is,” and found in the Hebrew name of Jesus, *Yehoshuah* (Joshua), יהושע, meaning “whose help is Jehovah” according to Gesenius. Joshua is none other than “Ἰησοῦς” in the LXX.

(*Echad*)” (עֶחָד אֵלֹהִים יְהוָה יְהוָה אֶחָד); and confirmed by Christ in Mark 12:29 (ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι πρώτη ἐστὶν ἅκουε Ἰσραὴλ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν).

Also, while *wahid* denotes one numerically and thus does not negate the existence of other “ones,” *ahad*, being also anarthrous, denotes *utter* uniqueness, one of a *genus*.¹²⁰² In addition, *Ahad* negates the henotheism of the pre-Islamic Arabs who certainly affirmed that Allah was *Wahid*, but also acknowledged the existence of lesser deities.¹²⁰³ With respect to Christianity, the Qur’an repudiates the belief that God has a “Son” (ولد) in the Trinitarian sense by stating that “Allah is only One (واحد) God” (Q 4:171.5). Thus while Allah is numerically one (واحد), the term *wahid* also denotes His “internal oneness,” i.e. He is only one *person* (hypostasis [υποστασις]; Arab. *nafs*; Heb. *nefesh*); there is no multiplicity in the godhead and He shares His Essence with no one and nothing else. This is the heart of the Qur’an’s critique of Trinitarianism. There are not multiple hypostatic (personal) pre-eternals; the attributes (*sifat*) of God are *not* separate and distinct hypostatic entities despite the Mu’tazilite charge. The usage of *Ahad* in this *ayah* (112:1), however, denotes God’s “external oneness” thus not allowing any creature to be the incarnation of that indivisible Essence (*ousia*) since He is transcendent of space, time, and materiality, contra both Incarnational Modalism (Monarchism) and

¹²⁰² al-Tabrisi, *al-Majma*,’ Q 112:1. For example, if I say, “I am one man” (أنا رجل واحد), it does not negate the existence of other men in creation, while “I am one man” (أنا رجل أحد) reveals that nothing else in existence can be described as having the quality of “manhood” except me. According to *The Study Qur’an*, al-Razi and al-Alusi considered the terms *wahid* and *ahad* as being synonymous (p 1579).

¹²⁰³ Thus al-Wahidi mentions another Occasion of its Revelation on the authority of Ubayy b. Ka’b who said that a group of idolaters (مشرکین) approached the Prophet and asked him, “What is the lineage of your Lord?” (Cf. *Asbab al-Nuzul*, Q 112:1).

Trinitarianism.¹²⁰⁴ In this vein, Hosea (11:9.5) says: “Indeed I am God and not man” (כִּי (אֵל אֶנֶכִּי וְלֹא-אִישׁ).¹²⁰⁵

Thus it is my contention that the Arabic “*Huwa*” (هو) is an abbreviated form of the tetragrammaton (יהוה), i.e. *Hu* (הו), the very Name of the Sacred *Ousia*. Hence “Jehovah” is *confirmed* in the Qur’an. Another example of its appearance is Q 2:255.1 (the Verse of the Throne [آية الكرسي]) which begins: “Allah! There is no God except *Huwa* (Adonai/” Jehovah”), the Living, the Self-Subsisting! (الله لا إله إلا هو الحي القيوم). Therefore, in Q 112.1, the *Huwa* is the subject, *Allah* its permutative, and *Ahad* the predicate. As can be seen below, Q 112.1 is literally the *Shema* of Deut. 6:4:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל	יְהוָה	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	יְהוָה	אֶחָד
قل:	هو	الله	(هو)	أحد	

(v. 2) The word *al-Samad* is a Qur’anic *hapax legomenon* with an uncertain meaning.

Wehr defines it as “eternal, everlasting,”¹²⁰⁶ while Lane says: “one to whom lordship ultimately pertains,”¹²⁰⁷ Creator of everything of whom nothing is independent and whose unity everything indicates,”¹²⁰⁸ and “above whom is no one.”¹²⁰⁹ Suyuti says: “The Self-Sufficient.”¹²¹⁰ In my view, the absolute independence of God is intimated by this *ayah* as well as the saying of the *‘ulema* in connection to this *ayah*: “Everything is in need of

¹²⁰⁴ God’s *ahadiyya* also prevents His “Spirit” or “Essence” from dwelling in objects such as stone, gold, or wood, cf. “Deutero-Isaiah” cc. 40-54.

¹²⁰⁵ This verse is translated into Arabic by the NAV (p. 236) as: إني الله ولا إنسان. The *lam* of negation in this verse is more properly called “the *lam* of complete negation of genus” (لام لنافي الجنس), which does not allow for an exception, unless one is intending to be extremely rhetorically emphatic as in *laa ilaha illa Allah* (لا إله إلا الله), with *ilaha* as accusative because it is being absolutely negated by this *lam*. In the LXX Hosea 11:9.5 reads: θεὸς ἐγὼ εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος.

¹²⁰⁶ Wehr, 613.

¹²⁰⁷ Lane, 1727 citing *Mohkam* of Ibn Seede and *Lisan al-‘Arab* of Ibn Manthur.

¹²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, citing *Lisan al-‘Arab* of Ibn Manthur.

¹²¹⁰ *Jalalayn*, Q 112:2.

Him while He is in need of nothing” (كل شيء يحتاج إليه وهو لا يحتاج إلى شيء). I agree with *The Study Qur'an* which says: “The enigmatic nature of *al-Samad* has led many interpretations, most of which are different formulations confirming that God is the Master and ontological Source of all things and that all things are dependent upon Him, while He is independent of all things.”¹²¹¹ Thus from the first two *ayahs* of *al-Ikhlās* we learn that God is *one (Wahid) person* (hypostasis) who is utterly and absolutely unique (*Ahad*) and that this one person is the *origin* and source of everything else in existence, i.e. *creation (makhlūqat)*, everything other than God (كل ما سوى الله).

(v. 3) In this *ayah* the Trinitarian critique is further developed. While the *ayah* literally reads, “He did not beget, nor was He begotten,” we must be cognizant of the multi-layered facet of Revelation, and that the Qur'an is critically responding to *both Ahl al-Kitāb* and the *mushrikin* of Mecca. That is precisely why this *ayah* has two very well attested occasions of its Revelation as al-Wahidi mentions. However, the Perennialist hermeneutic of *The Study Qur'an* becomes manifest when its editors say:

Although this verse is interpreted as denying that Jesus is the “Son of God” (see: 4:171; 9:30; 19:35, 91-92), it should be noted that the Christian notion of sonship is not the same as that held by the pagan Arabs, who are criticized in other verses for ascribing *offspring* to God (usually daughters), as in 16:57... Attempts to link this verse to discussions of Christianity are thus somewhat tenuous, and it is best understood in relation to the possible occasions of revelation mentioned in the surah introduction and to the Quranic critique of the pagan Arab notions of Divine procreation, as in 37:149-53... Such notions are distinct from the Christian understanding of Divine sonship in that the meaning of “son” in the phrase “Son of God” employed in the Christian creed is very different from the meaning of “son” in the Quran. For Christianity, the term “Son of God” refers to Jesus as the pretemporal, uncreated Word of God that is begotten of the Father before time. For the pagan Arabs, however, the progeny of God had a distinctly temporal and physical connotation; see 4:171c.¹²¹²

¹²¹¹ *The Study Qur'an*, p. 1580, Q 112:2.

¹²¹² *The Study Quran*, p 1580, Q 112.3.

The appeal here to (one of) the initial occasion(s) of Revelation is important, however one could argue that based upon the Qur'an's *overall* judgment of children being associated with God, there is no good reason why the foundational principle in Qur'anic exegesis known as the "Primary of the Generality"¹²¹³ would not apply to this *ayah* and thus be a condemnation of *all* forms of divine "childship" unless one intends an *absolutely* figurative (مجاز) meaning as found in the biblical text (Ps. 82:6; Matt. 6:9; Lk. 11:2; Jn 1:12; Rom. 8:14-15) and defined Qur'anically as (a) "servant(s) raised to honor" (عبد مكرم [Q 21:26.9]). Al-Qurtubi confirms that early Christians used the phrase in this honorific sense.¹²¹⁴ Trinitarians, however, do not mean "Son of God" as figurative, but literal (حقيقي), but not literal in the sense of physical begetting, but rather literal in the sense of the essential sameness (*homoousios*) and pre-eternality of two separate and distinct persons.¹²¹⁵ Both senses of "literalness" are antithetical to the theology of Sunnite Islam which espouses the utter and radical singularity of the "godhead." In the TSQ's description of "Christianity's" Christology (above), the editors would have done better to use "pre-eternal" rather than "pretemporal," the latter being more Arian than Trinitarian. Thus, I would argue, the Qur'an condemns *both* a physically begotten-son Christology, where Christ is called the *walad* (ولد) of God (as in Q 19:35) - a belief shared by almost 15 million Mormons based upon Luke 1:35 - as well as a pre-eternally begotten-son Christology, denoting Christ as the *ibn* (ابن) of God (as in Q 9:30) - a belief shared by 2.2 billion Trinitarians (Roman Cath., E. Ortho., and Prot.) and based upon the Johannine Prologue. Although the word *walad* could also refer to *any* type of "child" who is

¹²¹³ The principle is: "The salient point is due to the generality of the expression not due to the specificity of the occasion" (العبرة لعموم اللفظ لا لخصوص السبب); cf: al-Suyuti, *al-Itqan*, ch. 9.

¹²¹⁴ *al-Jami*, ' Q 9:30.

¹²¹⁵ See the writings of Athanasius, Augustine, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Aquinas.

claimed to be of God literally. In the latter *ayah*, the Qur'an says, "that is merely their utterance with their mouths" (ذلك قولهم بأفواههم), which I take the meaning to be as either: Christians claiming Christ to be the pre-eternal Son of God while their *Scriptures* do not say such things;¹²¹⁶ or Christians claim the title of "Son of God" to be pure metaphor *with their mouths*, but harbor belief in Jesus' deity in their hearts. When it comes to this *ayah* (9:30), TSQ is at a loss to explain why Jesus as "Ibn Allah" is so *highly* problematic. In fact, problematic enough to warrant: "God curse them!" (قاتلهم الله [Q 9:30.9]). The editors simply say certain Christians "may have taken this idea [Christ as divine Son] to the extreme."¹²¹⁷ But what can be more extreme than equating "Son of God" to *God Himself*? Indeed, the extremities of the *Ahl al-Kitab* regarding Jesus Christ are in fact the *normative* positions in those religions: God Himself on one extreme and merely a Rabbi on the other. The Qur'an deals a blow to both Modalism and as well Trinitarianism by explicitly prohibiting the *saying* of "three" entities, whether those three are gods (*theoi*) or persons (*hypostaseis*) of one god, "Do not (even) say "Three!", with the prohibitive *laa* (*laa al-nahiyah*): ولا تقولوا ثلاثة.

"O People of the Book (Bible)! Do not resort to extremes (extreme positions) in your religion(s). And do not say of God except the truth. The Christ, the son of Mary, is only the Sent One of God, and His Logos which He cast upon Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe (correctly) in God and in His Sent Ones. *And do not say "Three!"* Desist! (That would be) good for you! Allah is only one (*Wahid*) god.¹²¹⁸ Glory be to Him, that He should have a (literal) son! To Him alone belongs whatever is in the cosmos, and sufficient is God as a Defender. The Christ will *never* consider himself above being a (perfected) slave of God nor will the Archangels. (Q 4:171-172.1-5).

¹²¹⁶ Perhaps the "Qawl" (قول) of them (the Christians)" is a reference of the Logos, i.e. Christ, as in the nominative reading of Q 19:34 (*qawlu'l Haqq*). Thus "That is their Christ(ology) in their mouths (discourses and *exegetical* writings, namely, that Christ as Son of God = God)" - yet this Christ(ology) is not present in the *Injil*.

¹²¹⁷ *The Study Quran*, p 514, Q 9.30.

¹²¹⁸ i.e. a god who is an "internal unity," one person, the Monad, utterly singular in the "godhead."

While the Arabic of v. 3 is broad enough to cover both Pagan and Trinitarian conceptions of sonship (Lit. “He did not beget, nor was He begotten”), my translation is specifically intended to address the latter: “He did not derive an equal, nor was He a derived equivalent,” because *this* is what it means for Jesus to be the “literally begotten” Son of God according to Trinitarian exegetes. My argument thus runs: Whatever is “derived” from Him, even *before time*, is in reality *created* by Him and thus inferior to Him ontologically. God does not “give birth” to another person who is equal to Him; the very fact that this “second person” is *derived* and *caused* by the first person, i.e. the Monarch and Monad, invalidates the second person’s “equality” with the first. If this “birth” was accomplished “pre-eternally,” then the second person is no person at all, but rather a sanctified decree (logos) in the Mind of the Deity, since two separate *hypostaseis* who are both pre-eternal constitutes a type of veiled bi-theism, even if there exists a caveat claiming that they “share” an *ousia* and are thus essentially the same (ομοουσιος). Besides, God is only one *person* (Heb. *nefesh*, never used in the plural; cf. Isa. 42:1). Trinitarian exegetes insist that this “begetting” was neither totally voluntary (contra Judaism and Arianism) nor totally involuntary (contra Neo-Platonism), but rather a “natural” process, thus God was *always* a “Father,” i.e. there always was a Trinity. Sunnite theologians, such as al-Ghazali, argue that God is indeed the Primary Cause of everything, but that this Cause does not necessitate an effect; He is rather the “Free Agent” (الفاعل) who willed creation into existence due to His absolute volition. Al-Tahawi contends that God could have been qualified by the title of “Creator” (الخالق) even before His creation, because the *potential* for creation was “always there” with God.¹²¹⁹ If one

¹²¹⁹ Al-Tahawi says in Λογιον 14-15 of *The Tahawiyya*: “And just as He possessed His attributes pre-eternally (أزلياً), likewise He continues possesses them post-eternally (أبدياً). It is not after He created creation

wants to call the process of creation “natural” since God is *relational* “by nature,” that is fine, I think, but to argue that creation as a “derivative” of God is thus essentially equal with God is untenable.

(v. 4) TSQ says: “It [This *ayah*] is also taken as a refutation of the pre-Islamic Arabs, who had ascribed jinn as partners to God, as in 37:158.”¹²²⁰ I do not disagree with this, but I believe that from an Islamic standpoint, the *ayah* must also refer to Trinitarian theology which espouses doctrines such as *perichoresis* (περιχωρησις), in which the three *equal* persons of the Trinity experience an intercommunion and closeness that never becomes totally identical and that ultimately, they are *inseparable* in action.¹²²¹ However, God as a single person, has no equal, and no one shares His Essence, Attributes, and Actions. A great prophet, such as Jesus Christ, acting as a sanctified and “divine,” or rather “divinized,” agent of God (*a* “θεος”), can only be said to perform the actions of God *metaphorically*, since Christ’s will (θέλημα) has been brought into alignment with God’s well-pleasing (preferential) Will (إرادة; cf. John 5:30; 6:38; 9:31). Christ is a human extension of God’s action who mirrors God’s very character, yet he is not the “same” as the *very* God (αυτοθεος) nor “identical” with Him. As stated earlier, Christ acts “in a similar way” (ὁμοίως, cf. John 5:19), because he is the “*likeness* of God” (مثل الله; cf. Q 42:11.5) and thus a manifestation of God’s *tashbih* (تشبيه), to use the terminology of Ibn al-’Arabi. Thus I do not think it would be problematic to say that God and Christ experience a *level* of perichoresis in which their closeness never becomes identical, and even that they are inseparable in action. However, the caveat to the first statement is that

that he merits the name ‘The Creator’ (الخالق), nor by originating the creation does he merits the name ‘The Originator’ (الباري).”

¹²²⁰ *The Study Quran*, p 1580, Q 112.4.

¹²²¹ Cf. Augustine, *Epistles* 11.2; Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Ablabium*.

God and Christ as two distinct persons (*hypostaseis*) are *not* essentially equal, since the Son was created by the Father, while the caveat to the latter statement is that Christ's actions are "God's" actions only because Christ was made obedient to God's Will by the Father, which again intimates their essential inequality.

Conclusion

Both approaches to the Gospel of John outlined in this dissertation incorporate aspects of the historical critical method, with the first presupposing that John is the Gospel, the very *Injil*, while the second, *motivated by the belief that the Christian Scriptures have been adulterated*, demands that we initially analyze John non-theologically, that is historically, (without immediately pre-supposing its authenticity, indicative of the Duhemians), determine the best text of the Gospel by engaging in cutting-edge textual criticism, and then theologically analyze our findings in light of the Qur'an's sciences (علوم) as articulated by Sunnite authorities, i.e. concept of Revelation, variant readings, etc., its intertextual engagement with the New Testament, and its statements about Christ ("Logos [كلمة] of God," "Sign unto humanity [آية للناس]," predicted "Ahmad [أحمد]," etc). The first approach *begins* at confession while the second is *motivated* by it. Both approaches must be rigorously academic and sophisticated with respect to Islam and Christianity; only then can they be called *polemirenic*. *I am convinced that if the second approach is done correctly, it would more often than not lead one to the starting point of the first approach, namely, that the Gospel of John is the Injil of our Master Jesus Christ!* But this requires Muslim biblicists who are educated in the New Testament, Christian history, Greek, Christian theology, as well as in the

Qur'anic sciences, Islamic theology, and (*very* importantly) *Sufism* (theo-mysticism) as articulated by the champions of Sunnite tradition such as al-Junayd, al-Ghazali, Ibn al-'Arabi, and Ibn 'Ajibah. It is my hope that this dissertation will act as a springboard for a movement within the Muslim scholastic community (علماء) towards a full embracement of the Gospel of John as a sacred Revelation, *our* Revelation, and an actualization of “a common word” (كلمة سواء [Q 3:64.5]), a common Christology, through the examination of a common text. Thus, contrary to irenicists and Perennialists, the Qur'an criticizes the extremes of *Trinitarian* Christianity, not the Christian Scriptures. It criticizes the saying of “Three” (ثلاثة [Q 4:171.5]), the deification of Christ (Q 5:17), vicarious atonement (Q 6:164), and (ironically) the fact that many Christians have failed to judge the Qur'an by the *Injil* which contains “guidance (هدى)” and “light (نور)” (Q 5:46-47).¹²²² The Qur'an criticizes Trinitarian monotheism in which a multiplicity in the godhead is affirmed by appealing to the *message* of Christ (Q 3:50; John 17:3). Even though some Trinitarian theologians may characterize Islamic *wahdaniyya* (non-multiplicity in the godhead [*theotes*]) as God in “absolute solitude” or “sterile privacy,”¹²²³ this does not mean that Allah is not “social,” personal, or *intending* to involve Himself in relationships.

Our analysis has shown that something *resembling* the second method is the preferred (even only) method of contemporary SMBs such as Azami and Dirks.

However, I have come to the conclusion that these Muslim biblicists do not represent

¹²²² Even though the text of the Gospel is authenticated by this *ayah*, I agree with al-Razi that the Qur'an ultimately supersedes and abrogates the former Revelations with respect to its legal (*shar'i*) aspect, as the Qur'an is the final and thus the most relevant guide for humanity. Suyuti and al-Razi also mention that the Prophet Muhammad is described in the text of the *Injil* which the “People of the Gospel” have failed to notice, and as mentioned earlier, most Muslim biblicists point to the Paraclete (Syr. *Mnahmana*) of John as possible references to Muhammad (Cf. *al-Mafatih*, Q 5:47; *Jalalayn*, Q 5:47).

¹²²³ Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 13. To be accurate, these are Toom's words when describing Neo-Platonism, but I would imagine him describing *wahdaniyya* in these terms as well.

polemirenicism as I have defined the term, but are rather toned-down Ahmed Deedats, polished polemicists who have either failed to rigorously engage disciplines related to Christianity or/(and) have chosen(?) to ignore significant areas of concern when it comes to the Qur'an. Azami summarily ignores the *mudraj* readings of the Qur'an and their significance upon the broader understanding of the text while Dirks considers Muslims who maintain Muhammad to be the greatest prophet "contrary to Islam."¹²²⁴ (!) Where are the likes of al-Biruni, al-Ghazali, al-Biqā'i, and al-Razi today? While there are numerous historical critics who maintain *through* the historical critical method that the text of John is stable and able to be placed in the mid-first century, that John had one author, and that the text can be described as an exquisite literary masterpiece possessing "revelatory" elements such as chiasmic concords, symmetrical structures, irony, semi-poeticism, historical accuracy, and an ocean of wisdom, SMBs tend to rely on Troeltschian-minded historical critics who reject the notion of divine Revelation and often times make assumptions that would, ironically, greatly jeopardize the "authenticity" of the *Qur'an* and prophetic dicta (*ahadith*), if these assumptions were applied to them equally. These SMBs characterize the variant readings of John as evidence of textual "corruption" (تحريف); they view John's mentioning of the "Logos," the "I am statements," and phrases such as "the Jews" as constituting respectively, strong Hellenistic (non-Jewish) influence, reflections of the later (than Jesus) Johannine community's theocristological tensions, and obvious anachronisms, all present in John's "pseudo-gospel." Yet they tend to fail to notice (or mention) that there are numerous variant readings of the Qur'an, even textual aberrations (مدرج) attributed to "proto-orthodox" authorities (صحابية)

¹²²⁴ Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 37.

mentioned in the books of *‘ulum al-Qur’an*, such as Suyuti’s seminal *al-Itqan*. Classical Sunni authorities have various ways of dealing with these readings that range from appealing to the belief in the “Seven Letters” (سبعة أحرف) to claiming that these are actually “hermeneutical glosses” written by certain Sahaba after the clear establishment of their readings (قراءات).¹²²⁵ However SMBs tend not to delve any deeper than superficial understandings of Johannine textual criticism and fail to adequately engage with the Greek texts of ancient Alexandrian manuscripts such as P66, P75, ⲁ, and B and their significances with respect to the textual integrity of the Gospel of John.

They have also failed to notice the fact that God tailors His Revelation for its initial audience in order to firmly establish faith in their hearts - “never did We send an Apostle except (that he speak) in the *linguistics, idiosyncrasies, and thematics* (لسان) of his people” (Q 14:4). The Qur’an is poetic, deals with themes of business (تجارة), loyalty to leaders, Abraham as patriarchal leader, and emphasizes rigid monotheism, Resurrection, and Afterlife (آخرة) because this is exactly what the Qur’an’s initial audience, the Arabs, needed to experience and be firmly-rooted in as the Revelation’s first standard-bearers. Likewise, the beautifully eclectic milieu of Jesus Christ, where the ancient Near-East represented the locus of Greek culture, language, and philosophy with Jewish thought, ritual, scripture, and theology demanded the *Injil* to be tailored in such a

¹²²⁵ Contemporary scholar Jonathan A.C. Brown’s recent book entitled *Misquoting Muhammad* is a misnomer. While the title is an obvious play on Ehrman’s bestseller *Misquoting Jesus* in which the author makes a robust case for the textual corruption of the New Testament due to “proto-orthodox” interpolations, Brown has not a word to say about pre-Uthmanic variant readings of the Qur’an attributed to Companions of the Prophet such as Ibn ‘Abbas, ‘Abdullah b. Mas’ud, and Ubayy n. Ka’b. Brown rather focuses on the *hadith* corpus and at times surveys how certain *ayat* of the Qur’an have been *interpreted* in various ways by traditional authorities as well as contemporary scholars. His book, unfortunately, perpetuates the idea in many Christian minds that Muslims are just not willing to deal with aberrant or variant readings in their primary text, a text maintained to be the *ipsissima verba* of God. The title did make the author a lot of money though.

way as to be the means of a powerful transformation in the hearts of Hellenistic Jews who revered the LXX, starting with the Disciples and extending into the Greco-Roman provinces surrounding the Mediterranean such as Ephesus and Antioch. The Gospel of John, however, while containing elements such as epic hero-narrative, “dualistic tendencies,” and Logos as somewhat comparable to the divine “Mind” (*Nous*), thus rendering itself suitable for the Hellenistic palate, can also be understood as fully rooted in the theology and soteriology of first-century Middle-Eastern Judaism, with the help of the community at Qumran (DSS) and Philo of Alexandria. The Gospel of John gives a new theological flavor to what Middle-Platonists were already referring to as the “Logos” by portraying it/him (depending on whether the Logos is pre-eternal and impersonal or primordial and personal) as a “divine” mediator who “became flesh” thus demonstrating God’s love, concern, and involvement in human affairs *contra* Middle/Neo-Platonism where God is totally impersonal, nameless, and non-self-revelatory but *pro* Judaism, the religion of Jesus Christ, the incarnated Logos, where God is personal, named, and self-revelatory *through* His great prophets, and His “unique Son,” the Messiah. Thus the Gospel is the locus of the East and the West; a corrective of Hellenistic cosmology and confirmation of Jewish theology. This is exactly how the Qur’an presents itself as well. The Qur’an’s praising of Alexander the Great,¹²²⁶ the pupil of Aristotle, informs me that the author of the Qur’an is again intending to create a synthesis between the world’s civilizations. This is why Ghazali did *not* outright reject all things Greek. These texts are protected by God despite human attempts to alter them. The corruption (تحريف) of the Gospel cannot be in its text, it occurred only on the level of proto-orthodox

¹²²⁶ Cf. Suyuti, *al-Jalalayn*, 18:83.

interpretations of the text; exegetes who went to “extremes” (*ghuluw*) by relying too heavily upon Greek philo/theological concepts and non-biblical terms to explain a text that is in affirmation of the theology of the Children of Israel.

SMBs cling to the theory of a Syriac *Injil*-Archetype that is no longer extant to explain away what they consider to be contradictions between the New Testament Gospels and the Qur'an. Such a theory, however, raises several disturbing issues/questions. There is zero textual (external) evidence that such an Archetype ever existed. Thus it is an argument *ex silentio*. If it did, why did God not preserve it? If the Archetype is Q1 as Azami maintains, where are the birth narrative of Jesus and his miracles? If these traditions were added later by scribes (denoted as strata Q2 and Q3), why does the Qur'an clearly reference these “interpolations?” Why does the Qur'an refer to Christians as “*Ahl al-Injil*” (أهل الإنجيل), “the People of the Gospel,” *when they do not have the Gospel*? Why would the Qur'an appeal to previous Revelations as evidence of the Prophet Muhammad's legitimacy if those Revelations are “corrupted” beyond recovery, or altogether lost? Is God directing Christians to read a corrupted text? If the Gospel was “corrupted” in its text, what do we make of Q 6:115 (“There can be no changer of His words”). How could Waraqah b. Nawfal know the “*Injil*” and *write* it, if it was lost?¹²²⁷ Did Waraqah have access to the Archetype? Also, opening up the door of an Archetype which was *one* Gospel (as opposed to “Gospels”) has provoked non-Muslim critics of the Qur'an to posit a candidate known as the Diatessaron of Tatian, which of course is a Syriac Gospel Harmony of *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* that remained popular in Middle-Eastern churches clear into the Medieval period. It is rather obvious to

¹²²⁷ *Hadith* of Bukhari.

me, due to the Qur'an's intertextual interfaces and allusions to the biblical text, that the Qur'an is accepting the four Gospels as representing the accurate message of the *Injil*, which God Almighty inspired the Disciples of Jesus to write (Q 5:111). SMBs need to understand that there are various degrees of Revelation present in Muslim sacred sources as well as the biblical text. *Whatever Jesus said was Revelation, his spoken words during his life were the true "Archetype" of the Injil*; it was sometimes Level I Revelation (*ipsissima verba* of God) and sometimes Level II Revelation (*ipsissima vox* of God). Nothing was written down during this time however. The *Injil* was a teaching passed orally from Master to pupil. The Gospel of John was written a few decades after Christ's ascension by an evangelist whom I have consistently referred to as *al-Mulham*, the inspired. God inspired this evangelist in the Greek language to "codify" the message of Christ. His writing is Level III Revelation (*ilham* or *iha'*) which accurately captures the teachings of Christ, and is thus confirmed by the Qur'an.

Finally, with respect to alleged contradictions between the Gospel of John and the Qur'an, I would contend that such contradictions only exist on the very superficial surface. Jesus Christ as "unique god" (μονογενὴς θεὸς [1:18.5]), "Son of God" (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ [1:49.5]), or "lamb of God" (ὁ ἄμνός τοῦ θεοῦ [1:36.9]) can be comfortably understood by gleaned the historical usage of such titles as clear Hebraisms with origins in the Tanakh as well as by envisaging Christ as a perfected slave (عبد) of God who selflessly interceded as a *mushaffi'* for the sake of his people, not in the sense of vicarious atonement through blood sacrifice, but rather to set an exalted example of virtue (فضل) for his future followers, like our Master Husayn b. 'Ali. Jesus was a spiritual Master (مرشد), a "Sufi" *par excellence*, whose message and life *must* be studied through the lens

of Islamic theo-mysticism, the truths of which were taught by all prophets of God starting with Adam. Unfortunately, contemporary SMBs who continue to maintain a dissonance between the Gospel of John and the Qur'an tend to reflect a spiritual anemia in their analyses that leaves them clinging to the tired *Injil*-Archetype theory. Other alleged problems such as Christ's "I am (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) statements" as well as his commands to "eat" his "flesh" and "drink" his "blood" (John 6) can also be reconciled by analyzing Jesus' Jewish textual background as well as by engaging substantively with the original Greek of the text, as I have done according to my first method. Furthermore, the "equality" of God and Christ intimated by John (10:30) exists at the level of will and obedience, not on the level of ontology. This is exactly true with respect to our Master Muhammad as well (Cf. Q 9:62). Christ as God's sanctified/divinized agent and "mirror" upon the earth enjoys *theositic* mystical union (جمع) with God due to his actualization (تحقق) of all of the divine attributes (صفات) within himself. Christ is the great teacher of the spiritual path (طريقة) who is annihilated (فناء) in God's very character and thus subsists or "remains" (بقاء) in God's love (محبة). Christ as divine mediator taught his Disciples that adherence (إتباع) to his commands equates adherence to God, and finally entrusted his sacred teachings to his Holy House (*Hagioikos*; أهل البيت) who produced the Gospel (إنجيل) of John under divine inspiration (إلهام). With respect to the Crucifixion, the Johannine affirmation of it need not be at loggerheads with the Qur'an (Q 4:157) as there are ways of understanding this *ayah* in light of other *ayat* that make the Crucifixion of Christ a reality according to the Qur'an, as I have mentioned. Classical Muslim *polemirenic*al biblicists such as Ghazali and al-Razi problematized the normative exegetical narrative of literal Docetism due to their honest and profound scholarship.

اللهم ربنا انفع الناس بهذا الكتاب واجعله خالصا لوجهك الكريم.
إنك سميع مجيب.

والحمد لله رب العالمين في المبدأ والخاتم.
وصل الله على سيدنا محمد النبي الإمي
وعلى آله وصحبه وأهل بيته وسلم.
وصل الله على سيدنا عيسى المسيح كلمة الله
وعلى آله وحواريه وأمه وأهل بيته وسلم.
آمين

O Allah our Lord! Benefit the people through this book and
render it purely for the seeking of Your Noble
Countenance.

All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the universe at the
beginning and end.

You are the All-Hearing, the One who responds.
Bless and grant peace upon our liege-lord Muhammad, the
Gentile Prophet, and upon his folk, Companions, and Holy
House.

And bless and grant peace upon our liege-lord Jesus Christ,
the Logos of God, and upon his folk, Disciples, Mother,
and Holy House.

Amen!

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